

# Performing Borders

A Study Room Guide on physical and conceptual borders within Live Art



Compiled & written by Alessandra Cianetti  
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Live Art  
Development  
Agency

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## **Performing Borders**

### **A Study Room Guide by Alessandra Cianetti**

*'The border can be a method precisely insofar as it is conceived of as a site of struggle.'* (Mezzadra, Neilson, 2013)

This Study Room Guide explores the ways Live Art practices have been responding to the notion of borders, both physical and conceptual. As a 'border practice' that crosses and pushes boundaries, Live Art has been one of the most responsive ways in which artists have been addressing the shifting notion of borders and connected societal issues. From this perspective, the ephemerality, flexibility and resilience of Live Art become a privileged way to investigate urgent current political changes and struggles within and across borders. This Guide explores the notion of border in relation to Live Art and the works of experimental artists that have been addressing issues around physical borders, with a special focus on the current European situation and its multiple crises.

The Guide includes a theoretical introduction on the relation between Live Art and social sciences' border theories; a focus on how practitioners are responding to the current shifting European border landscapes through a series of interviews published on the blog 'performingborders. Live Art | crossings | europe'; and a list of resources on the theoretical notion of border, Live Art, and Europe available in LADA's Study Room.

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### Border practices: Live Art and Borders

The border is a process, an order, an iteration. It is uneven, performative, aural, porous, shifting, changing, fixed, relative, internalised, multiple, returning, ubiquitous. The border is a negotiation, a threshold, a liminal, temporal contingent 'space', overdetermined framing, classed, racist, financed, commercial, violent, passive-aggressive. It is a 'wound', a residence, a 'home', a text, a subtext, a superego, a shibboleth, deconstructed, reconstructed, electrified, media, stupid.<sup>1</sup>

In the last decades borders have become a crucial site for political research and artistic practice.<sup>2</sup> In its crossing borders and entering different fields, Live Art has been experiencing what political theorists Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, in their analysis of borders within the contemporary world, call the 'productive power of borders': their role in the fabrication of the world as a centre of contemporary experience.<sup>3</sup> If 'criticality is a strategy for the production of knowledge',<sup>4</sup> Live Art practices sit at the very centre of such criticalities, working on boundaries between disciplines, media, and social, political and economic issues.

This introductory essay to the Study Room Guide investigates conceptual routes to make sense of discourses about the relationships between borders, Live Art and the production of knowledge. The aim is to analyze forms that are 'non reproductive/reproducible and always already

<sup>1</sup> Hutnyk, J. (2012) *Beyond Borders* London: Pavements Books, pp.1-4

<sup>2</sup> Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. (2013) *Borders As Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. vi.

<sup>4</sup> Thornton, S. (2008) *Seven Days in the Art World* London: Granta Publications, p. 62.

vanishing, even as [they are] becoming',<sup>5</sup> looking at Live Art as a *praxis of becoming* that escapes fixed and final ends. As per Allan Kaprow's definition of 'happenings': 'context rather than category. Flow rather than work of art.'<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, in the many definitions of Live and Performance Art there is a common and constant reference to the work that artists do at the 'borders'.<sup>7</sup> Focusing on this common reference to the border and the liminal function and approaches of Live Art, this essay references border studies in order to understand the potentialities of the concept of border as a site of knowledge production.<sup>8</sup>

### **Live Art and Borders**

The 'invention' of borders in Europe marks the birth of the modern nation-state, with the term border replacing former notions such as the Roman Empire's *limes* and the Medieval *marches*. This process synthesised what Étienne Balibar, one of the authorities on the study of borders in the last decades, defines as *territorialisation of space*.<sup>9</sup> Although for him borders' function of demarcation and territorialisation is still present today, the *territorialisation of space*, linked only with the most common idea of border as a tool for mapping, is a one-sided 'philosophically speaking approach'.<sup>10</sup> Balibar declares that 'any process of 'territorialisation' is also the reverse side of another, opposite, process of 'deterritorialization', which takes place before, or after, or simultaneously'.<sup>11</sup> In his opinion, if we use the generalised concept of 'territory'<sup>12</sup> – that along with the division and articulation of spatial units includes their 'institutional counterparts',<sup>13</sup> that is, the 'power structures that shape spaces, languages, moralities, symbols, productive activities etc. – to 'territorialize' means to assign 'identities' for collective subjects within structures of

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<sup>5</sup> Summers, R. 'Vaginal Davis does Art History', in Harris, J. (2007) *Dead History, Live Art? Spectacle, Subjectivity and Subversion in Visual Culture since the 1960s* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press + Tate Liverpool, p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> Aldouri, H. (2016) 'Prêt-à-mager'. Review of *In The Flow*, by Boris Groys. *Radical Philosophy*, 197(2), p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> For example: RoseLee Goldberg defines Performance Art as a way of breaking down walls within categories (Goldberg, R. (2001) *Performance Art. From Futurism to the Present*. 3rd edn. New York: Thames & Hudson, p.7).

Adrian Heathfield talks of Live Art as 'a mean through which to test the foundations and borders of identity' (Heathfield, A. (2004) *Live Art and Performance* London: Tate Publishing, p.10).

The Live Art Development Agency sees it as a way to disrupt 'borders, breaking rules, defying traditions, resisting definitions, asking awkward questions and activating audiences' (Live Art Development Agency (2015). Available at: [www.thisisliveart.co.uk](http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk), Accessed: 5 August 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Harris, J. (2007) *Dead History, Live Art? Spectacle, Subjectivity and Subversion in Visual Culture since the 1960s* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press + Tate Liverpool, p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> Balibar, É. 'Europe as Borderland', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27 (2), pp. 191-192.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.192.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

power, and, therefore, to categorize and individualize human beings – and the figure of the ‘citizen’ [...] is exactly a way of categorizing individuals.’<sup>14</sup>

Because of these overlapping functions and the effects borders have both on geographies and subjects, at the end of the essay ‘*Europe as Borderland*’, Balibar highlights the increasing centrality of the notion of border in contemporary political debates, stating that there is a paradox of the movement of borders from the edge to the centre of political space and debate.<sup>15</sup>

In response and constant dialogue with Balibar, political theorists Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson in their *Borders As Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* look at borders as essentially an interpretative method:

‘Method for us is as much about acting on the world as it is about knowing it. [...] it is about the relation of action to knowledge in situations where many different knowledge regimes and practices come into conflict. Border as method involves negotiating the boundaries between the different kinds of knowledge that come to bear on the border and, in so doing, aims to throw light on the subjectivities that come into being through such conflicts. [...] the border is for us not so much a research object as an epistemological viewpoint that allows an acute critical analysis not only of how relations of domination, dispossession, and exploitation are being redefined presently but also of the struggles that take shape around these changing relations’.<sup>16</sup>

Mezzadra and Neilson define borders as sites of conflict, as ‘complex social institutions, which are marked by tensions between practices of border reinforcement and border crossing’.<sup>17</sup> For them the crisis of cartographical reason<sup>18</sup> highlighted previously by Balibar, is a sign of the shifting of the notions of ‘interiority and exteriority, which form the basis of the representation of the border’.<sup>19</sup> Borders, although still performing a ‘world-configuring function [...], are often subject to shifting and unpredictable patterns of mobility and overlapping, appearing and

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<sup>14</sup> Balibar, É. ‘Europe as Borderland’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27 (2), p. 192.

<sup>15</sup> ‘[...] Sometimes noisily and sometimes sneakily borders have changed place. Whereas traditionally, and in conformity with both their juridical definition and “cartographical” representation as incorporated in national memory, they should be at the edge of territory, marking the point where it ends, it seems that borders and the institutional practices corresponding to them have been transported into the middle of political space. They can no longer function as simple edges, external limits of democracy that the mass of citizens can see as a barrier protecting their rights and lives without ever really interfering with them [...]. Ibid., pp. 109-110.

<sup>16</sup> Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. (2013) *Borders As Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp.17-18.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Balibar, É. (2004) *We, the people of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 5.

disappearing as well as sometimes crystallizing in the form of threatening walls that break up and reorder political spaces that were once formally unified'.<sup>20</sup> The constant recombination of spaces and times is at the centre of Mezzadra and Neilson's analysis of the process of proliferation and transformation of borders.<sup>21</sup> That is what for them constitutes the symbolic dimension of border as an essential tool for cognitive processes; a tool that allows the structuring of movements of thoughts through establishing taxonomies and hierarchies of concepts.<sup>22</sup>

Geographical and 'portable' borders got at the centre of Live Art studies with the bold theoretical attempt to blend the ever-developing notion of border with the shifting nature of the performative medium made in 2015 by art historian Ila Nicole Sheren in *'Portable Borders. Performance Art and Politics on the U.S. Frontera since 1984.'*<sup>23</sup>

Using the theoretical paradigm of *border thinking* by semiotician Walter Mignolo as her starting point,<sup>24</sup> Sheren points to the 1980s as the decade when live interventions met the geographic border. In particular, she focuses on the border between the US and Mexico, La Frontera, and the site-specific works and projects of the artist collective Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo (BAW/TAF). At that time, the collective acted as a key agent in conceptualising the link between border and performance. For Sheren the collaborations among this variegated group of artists that mixed the Chicano tradition with performative and activist elements led to an interpretation of the border itself as a performance between nations.<sup>25</sup> Guillermo Gómez-Peña – one of the most known artists that started as part of the BAW/TAF and whose practice has been challenging notions of gender, racial and geographical boundaries, limits and borders – explained the changing relation between the artist and the border within that initial experience at La Frontera and the subsequent development of his own international practice towards the concept of 'portability' in the following terms:

'[W]e really focused on the border as a site of possibilities, as a spiral model as opposed to a dividing line and with the whole idea of the artist as a social thinker, as a binational diplomat, as an alternative chronicler [...]. So I think that the border method – the border way of working as an artist – implies crossing of internal borders between multiple milieus and

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<sup>20</sup> Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. (2013) *Borders As Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Sheren, I. N. (2015) *Portable Borders. Performance Art and Politics on the U.S. Frontera since 1984* Austin: Texas University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Mignolo, W. 'Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledge, and Border Thinking' in Sheren, I. N. (2015) *Portable Borders. Performance Art and Politics on the U.S. Frontera since 1984*. Austin: Texas University Press, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Sheren, I. N. (2015) *Portable Borders. Performance Art and Politics on the U.S. Frontera since 1984* Austin: Texas University Press, pp. 41-43.



multiple contexts...especially those of academia, the media, activism, and the art world. [...] We began to theorize the border as a paradigm, as a theoretical paradigm that would contest Eurocentric postmodern paradigms. [...] Overlapping universes could only be articulated by an equally complex art form [...] because in many ways performance is a border language... [it] is the clash of disparate elements in the same way border is.<sup>26</sup>

According to Sheren, Gómez-Peña has made the fundamental contribution of moving the performative investigation of borders away from a specific location, thus advancing the definition of performance art as a border language. The concept of 'portable borders' allows for an expansion of the category of Border Art beyond its traditional geographical boundaries. Thus, the knowledge generated from a specific geographical border and the collective history of a specific border context can flow across boundaries via the practice of portability. The lesson learned from the '80s and '90s performative experiences at the site-specific border at La Frontera can now, for Sheren, be applied internationally,<sup>27</sup> opening up the concept of borders within the arts via their 'conceptual portability'.

In Sheren's work, border is defined as a shifting phenomenon that refers to a 'variety of non-physical boundaries: those between cultural or belief systems, those separating the colonial and the postcolonial, and even those demarcating various kinds of subjects'.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, performance art can be defined as a border language, and at the same time the border comes to represent a space of performance.<sup>29</sup> In her thinking, the border becomes a site of production of sharable and portable knowledge.

Ila Nicole Sheren brings the border into the discussion about performance art not only as a way to think about performers' works but also as a potential way 'to allow for a complete reinvention of the traditional narratives of art history'.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, the expanded – portable – notion of 'Border Art' can be seen as a new paradigm to reimagine the study of art from its margins.<sup>31</sup> Given that Live Art might be conceived of as 'radical critique of the organisation of knowledge',<sup>32</sup> the challenge for contemporary theorists and historians is to keep up with practitioners' work and to look at new approaches to conceptualise contemporary practices<sup>33</sup> within what art historian Amelia Jones defines as 'the radical instability of the category of art'.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-43.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 134-135.

<sup>32</sup> Harris, J. (2007) *Dead History, Live Art? Spectacle, Subjectivity and Subversion in Visual Culture since the 1960s* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press + Tate Liverpool, p.128.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.141.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.119.

## **Live Art as a Borderscape**

In '*Border as a Method*', Mezzadra and Neilson state that the value of the borders as a means of research lies in their productive power as a method, while their

existence is fragmented, multi-layered, constantly shifting both in space and time. For the authors 'to approach the border as a method means to suspend, to recall a phenomenological category, the set of disciplinary practices that present the objects of knowledge as already constituted and investigate instead the process by which these objects are constituted.'<sup>35</sup>

As for the Guillermo Gómez-Peña's persona *The Brujo*<sup>36</sup> – symbol of portable cross-border performative practices – the artist becomes the researcher of these spaces, the international border crosser. In Sheren's words – that have echoes of Heidegger's writing, as discussed later in this essay – the artist is the potential *border dweller* who co-habits spaces of cultural and social differences.<sup>37</sup> This is a difficult position to inhabit and coexist within, according to Étienne Balibar: 'you can live on one side or the other side of a border (geographic, social, etc...) but to be yourself a border it is much more problematic, border being part of your identity and how you are perceived by others'.<sup>38</sup>

If a Live Artist is a 'border dweller' she puts herself in a *place* that for Michel de Certeau can be defined as fixed and controlled 'locatedness' but also she is on a *space* that is a practiced place, used by individuals who cross it, occupy it and re-use it.<sup>39</sup> And if for Theodor Adorno home is a concept of the past therefore dwelling is now made impossible,<sup>40</sup> what Live Art does is to work in the shifting, non-determined spaces that are borders, building a 'home'<sup>41</sup> although temporary, a possibility of 'familiarity', through live interventions.

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- Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. (2013) *Borders As Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 17

- Sheren, I. N. (2015) *Portable Borders. Performance Art and Politics on the U.S. Frontera since 1984* Austin: Texas University Press, p. 86.

- 'Rather than being grounded in the specifics of regional politics or concerned with enacting incremental change, as were the BAW/TAF and even the Chicano movement before it, this portable border addressed a broader audience. In doing so, border artists considered everyone to be a potential dweller, regardless of physical location. For these artists, "the border" could be a state of mind as well as a boundary between nations; in the most extreme theorization, the border occurs wherever there are places of coexisting cultural or social difference'. Ibid., p. 60.

- Étienne Balibar at 'Topology: Spaces of Transformation: Borders' at Tate Modern, 5-November 2011, transcript mine. Tate Modern Museum (2011) *Topology: Spaces of Transformation: Borders*. Available at: [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk) (Accessed: 20 January 2016).

- Steyn, J. and Stamselberg, N. (2014) *Breaching Borders: Art, Migrants and the Metaphor of Waste* London: I.B.Tauris, p. 73.

- 'Adorno warned that 'dwelling', in the proper sense, is now impossible. Moreover, he tells us, 'home is past [...]'. Ibid., p. 98.

- Dwelling is here intended in the Heideggerian interpretation 'as synonymous with being in place or as a making of place and even feeling at home [...] (feeling at home in the context of art making, being comfortable and familiar with)'. Markiewicz, L. (2007) 'No Place – Like Home', in Durrant, S. and Lord, C. M. (2007) *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics: Cultural*

In the impossibility of finding a fixed place in a world whose 'national boundaries (although still important) are relativized'<sup>42</sup> and where the experience of decentredness becomes central<sup>43</sup>, the willingness of Live Art practices to research into the notion of borders (geographical, cultural, medium-based, relational, to name only a few) and dwell in that shifting space, reminds us of the relation between *building* and *dwelling* in Martin Heidegger.<sup>44</sup> In Heidegger's thinking we live within an event, the Modern one, which is constantly in the process of becoming outside the frame of instrumental reasons. For him, to build something within this continuous process is not a means toward dwelling but – in its double meaning of cultivate and *aedificare* – *building* is already *dwelling*.<sup>45</sup> Thus *building* is inextricable from *dwelling*, and *space* designates 'something that has been made room for, something [...] within a boundary',<sup>46</sup> in which boundary is something that does not stop but 'is that from which something *begins its presencing* [...] Space is in essence that for which room has been made, that which is let into its bounds'.<sup>47</sup>

Artists working with Live Art seek and sit in this space where boundaries commence presence, and Live Art practices produce, *let appear* (to use Heidegger's choice of words), what was not there before, where *letting-appear* means bringing 'something made, [...] something present among the things that are already present'.<sup>48</sup> In this partial version of Heidegger's intricate text, the conclusions are that the nature of *building*, within a constant process of becoming, is *letting dwell* because 'only if we are capable of dwelling only then we can build'.<sup>49</sup> Live Art, working (building)

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*Practices Between Migration and Art-Making* Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V, p. 5 and p. 37.

- 'In the passage to the Empire, national space loses its definition, national boundaries (although still important) are relativized, and even national imaginaries are destabilized. As national sovereignty is displaced by the authority of the new supranational power, Empire, political reality loses its measure. In this situation, the impossibility of representing the people becomes increasingly clear and thus the concept of the people itself tends to evaporate'. Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2002) 'Globalisation and Democracy', in Enwezor, O., Basualdo, C., Bauer, U.M., Ghez, S., Maharaj, S., Nash, M., and Zaya, O. (2002) *Democracy Unrealized, Documenta 11\_Platform 1 catalogue* Kassel: Hatje Cantz Publishers, p. 326.

- Markiewicz, L. (2007) 'No Place – Like Home', in Durrant, S. and Lord, C. M. (2007) *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics: Cultural Practices Between Migration and Art-Making* Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V, p. 38.

- Heidegger, M. (1971) *Poetry, Language, Thought* New York: Harper Colophon Books.

- 'The Old English and High German word for building, *baun*, means to dwell. This signifies: to remain, to stay in place. The real meaning of the verb *bauen*, namely, to dwell, has been lost to us. But a covert trace of it has been preserved in the German word, *Nachbar*, neighbour. The neighbour is in Old English the *neahgehur*, *neah*, near, and *geburi*, dweller. [...] The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is *Bauan*, dwelling'. Ibid., pp. 144-145.

- Ibid., p. 152.

- Ibid.

- Ibid., p. 157.

- Ibid.

within the space of borders – that have been *relativized*<sup>50</sup>, made disjointed and *portable*<sup>51</sup> – attempts to let that space appear in order to create new knowledge. In this creation of knowledge and in its working at the very centre of decentred borders, we can see how Live Art makes them *productive* – as in Mezzadra and Neilson’s political theory approach<sup>52</sup> – in a restless research for openness, metamorphosis, multimediality and dialogue with different audiences, spaces, and times.

Sitting both at the borders of the art market and within a constant process of research, Live Art presents as central what for Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri is the excessive and monstrous power of invention of the *flesh*, which is the primary material to investigate possibilities of counterbalancing the capitalistic world-system they call *Empire*. ‘The flesh is pure potentiality, the unformed stuff of life, an element of being. [...] What acts on the flesh and gives it form are the powers of invention, those powers that work through singularities to weave together hybridizations of space and metamorphoses of nature – the powers, in short, that modify the modes and forms of existence’.<sup>53</sup>

Live Art creates the possibility to exceed the space of the artwork, flood into public spaces, and rethink those spaces and our relationship with borderline concepts and places. It seems that Live Art with its complexity could be seen as a borderscape, as a space that is represented, perceived and lived-in, as a ‘fluid field of a multitude of political negotiations, claims, and counterclaims; [...] zone of varied and differentiated encounters [...] as a way of thinking through, about, and of alternatives to dominant landscapes of power’.<sup>54</sup>

If for Mezzadra and Neilson ‘the border can be a method precisely insofar as it is conceived of as a site of struggle’,<sup>55</sup> we might dare to say that - when it explicitly engages with the geographical borders between states, and when it dwells on other human, social, political, artistic issues - Live Art can be a method precisely insofar as it is conceived of as a site of border-struggle.

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• Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2002) ‘Globalisation and Democracy’, in Enwezor, O., Basualdo, C., Bauer, U.M., Ghez, S., Maharaj, S., Nash, M., and Zaya, O. (2002) *Democracy Unrealized, Documenta 11\_Platform 1 catalogue* Kassel: Hatje Cantz Publishers, p. 326.

• Sheren, I. N. (2015) *Portable Borders. Performance Art and Politics on the U.S. Frontera since 1984* Austin: Texas University Press.

• Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. (2013) *Borders As Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* Durham and London: Duke University Press.

• Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2002) ‘Globalisation and Democracy’, in Enwezor, O., Basualdo, C., Bauer, U.M., Ghez, S., Maharaj, S., Nash, M., and Zaya, O. (2002) *Democracy Unrealized, Documenta 11\_Platform 1 catalogue* Kassel: Hatje Cantz Publishers, pp. 334-335.

• Buoli, A. (2013) *Envisioning Euro-Mediterranean Borderscapes. Interplays of Actors, Networks and Landscape practices*. Available at: <https://futureresearchideas.wordpress.com> (Accessed: 19 April 2016).

• Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. (2013) *Borders As Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* Durham and London: Duke University Press, p.18.

**Some of the key resources these reflections are based on:**

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

LADA Study Room available resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
Pbl	'Portable Borders', 2015	Ila Nicole Sheren	P2839
Pbl	'Borders As Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor', 2013	Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson	P3024
Additional resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
Pbl	'Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledge, and Border Thinking', 2000	Walter Mignolo	
Art	The Portable Border: Site-Specificity, Art, and the U. S.-Mexico Frontier, 1994	Claire F. Fox	Social Text, No. 41 (Winter, 1994), pp. 61-82.
DIC	'performingborders. art   crossings   Europe' Central Saint Martins, 2016	Organised by Alessandra Cianetti	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrTyi1Dwl-Y&amp;feature=youtu.be">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrTyi1Dwl-Y&amp;feature=youtu.be</a>



### INTERVIEWS: *Live Art, Crossings, Europe*

'performingborders. Live Art | crossings | europe' is a one-year-long exploration of Live Artists who are responding to the challenging notion of contemporary borders and the shifting concept of a Europe in flux that is 'a passage, a traversing or crossing.'<sup>56</sup>

Running from February 2016 to February 2017, each month the blog publishes an interview with an artist, academic or art professional, as a way to open up the debate on what the contemporary meaning of border in Live Art is and how artists are addressing this issue within Europe.

The patchy, spontaneous responses of artists to the current European situation of increasing migratory movements, conflicts, and surveillance of people's movements, seem not to allow yet for a historical perspective or a coherent mapping of what is currently happening in a fast-paced and fluid reality. The different contributions and works presented below and coming from artists, academics and arts organisations illustrate this fragmentary context and how multiple perspectives on borders are addressed in different performative European and international scenes. Borders, the institutional systems that support and are supported by them, and the bodies that confront them crash against each other in the works of Núria Güell and Helena Walsh who want to critique and change, suggesting new ways of working through, against, and around them. On the contrary, in Tania El Khoury's work, the focus is on how to engage the public with the personal stories of people that lost their lives or are in

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<sup>56</sup> Giunta, C. (2016) 'The Universal is Back', *Radical Philosophy* 192 (3), p. 64.

movement to try and save themselves, in order not to overlook precious memories of an ongoing narrative of pain and struggle within and across state borders. On their part, Natasha Davis and Sarah Zaltash start from a personal reflection on geography and routes to address broader issues related to their own body, space, and the engagement of ‘fellow travellers’.

The circumstances artists are working in are definitely – to use Marilena Zaroulia’s term – ‘excessive’ as the actual situation of proliferation of borders is. If contemporary artists are interested primarily in their own present – that we do not know and often surprises us –<sup>57</sup> we can say, borrowing Boris Groys’s definition of what the avant-garde’s role could be, that Live Art cannot predict the future in its constant responses to the current European situation ‘but rather demonstrates the transitory character of the present – and thus opens a way for the new’.<sup>58</sup>

The following interviews aim to map some of the ways in which Live Art has been engaging with the present and can open up ways for the new.

Interviewees:

Lois Keidan | February 2016  
 Tania El Khoury | March 2016  
 Núria Güell | April 2016  
 Helena Walsh | May 2016  
 Almir Koldzic | June 2016  
 Natasha Davis | July 2016  
 Marilena Zaroulia | August 2016  
 Sara Zaltash | September 2016

Further interviews from October 2016 to February 2017 will be published on <https://performingborders.wordpress.com>

### **Additional resources connected to the topic:**

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

LADA Study Room available resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
Pbl	‘In the Flow’, 2016	Boris Groys	
Additional resources			

<sup>57</sup> Groys, B. (2016) *In the Flow* London: Verso, p.137.  
<sup>58</sup> Groys, B. (2016) *In the Flow* London: Verso, p.7.

Type	Title	Author	Reference
DIC	'performingborders. art   crossings   Europe' Central Saint Martins, 2016	Organised by Alessandra Cianetti	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrTyi1Dwl-Y&amp;feature=youtu.be">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrTyi1Dwl-Y&amp;feature=youtu.be</a>
DfC	Catalogue of EURO   PHONIA exhibition, London, 2016, pp.45-55 & pp.64-73	Giulia Colletti and Maisie Linford	<a href="https://issuu.com/europhonia/docs/final_europhonia_catalogue">https://issuu.com/europhonia/docs/final_europhonia_catalogue</a>
DIA	Love Letters to a (Post-) Europe	Diana Damian Martin interviews Lisa Alexander	<a href="http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/love-letters-to-a-post-europe/">http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/love-letters-to-a-post-europe/</a>



**Alessandra Cianetti:** In the publication 'Live, Art and Performance' Adrian Heathfield sees four main ways to address the multiform approaches of Live Art practices: the categories of temporality, displacement, flesh and 'elemental life'. Do you think this definition refers specifically to UK and European practices? Or does it extend to the US tradition as codified by RoseLee Goldberg?

**Lois Keidan:** I think Live Art as a concept is not so much to do with defining the practice of artists but more about how to contextualise and frame those practices. RoseLee Goldberg's famous canonisation is more to do with performance art and the practices of artists within the visual arts who are working in a gallery context, and with the image. I think there is a sort of difference with the UK and Europe in comparison with the US in that the framework RoseLee puts around performance artists is to do with the relationship within visual art and dance primarily, whereas in the UK it was much to do with visual art and theatre and I think that to a certain extent it is possibly the same in mainland Europe as well. But for me Live Art is not about that, but a way to talk about what art can be, about how is made, where is made, who is made with, who is made for, how it is experienced, how is written about, how is documented and archived. Adrian Heathfield's categories absolutely relate to both performance art and Live Art .

**AC:** The border has been the centre of attention for many artists – think for example about Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Francis Alÿs, and Tania El Khoury. Artists have been challenging both physical borders and the borders between disciplines, genders, traditions, spaces. What is in your opinion the relation between Live Art and borders?

**LK:** Live Art is a way to break down borders and boundaries within artistic disciplines, and a way to disrupt and rethink hierarchies. Live Art is able to cross boundaries between art and politics and cross not only conceptual borders but also physical ones, due to its site specificity and responsiveness to its contexts and audiences and its non dependence on language or much of the paraphernalia of art or theatre or dance.

**AC:** I am interested in the shifting notion of Europe with the actual crises we are currently witnessing and living within. How are Live Artists responding to it in your opinion? Which works do you think are relevant to describe the response Live Art is giving to these current urgent issues? How do you relate with other European realities?

**LK:** There is not much that I am aware of at the moment, and maybe it is too soon for artists to respond. However I can think of the work of organisations such as Counterpoints Arts, Index on Censorship, Tania

Bruguera's Immigrant Movement International, and the collective Between the Borders based in Liverpool. From my limited experience what artists and others based in the UK are doing in response to the European situation seems more immediate and practical than conceptual. It is about getting resources to the Jungle in Calais and organising petitions to local Councils demanding homes for refugees. I'm not so aware of artworks or projects that are in direct response to the crisis.

We are part of a EU funded project called the Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP). It's a network of nine partner organisations focusing on collaborative practices within socially engaged contexts. Some of the conversations we've been having are about how we might collectively respond to this crisis and what our cultural and political responsibilities are, especially as there are partners in Hungary and Germany – countries on the front line of the current situation.

**AC: Among LADA's main resources to build knowledge around Live Art are the Study Room and LADA's online shop Unbound. How does this archiving and knowledge-sharing effort keep up with an always new and changing practice such as Live Art? How do you involve the overall community in supporting this work?**

**LK:** We partly do that internally – three members of the LADA team have their own practice – Alex Eisenberg is an independent curator and producer, Katy Baird is an artist and curator, Aaron Wright is an independent curator. But we also collectively keep our eyes open and are constantly thinking about what we should be representing and stocking on Unbound. With the Study Room, how we acquire materials and undertake research is much broader – we always ask Study Room users to recommend titles and subjects that we should have and respond to that feedback. So for example, recently a Study Room user said that we didn't have material on 'motherhood' so we approached artists that we know are doing work around that subject. They sent us their reading lists, we acquired these titles and also commissioned one of them to write a Study Room Guide on the subject. We also try to involve the overall community by opening up the Study Room on evenings and weekends through our new Study Room Ambassador Scheme, and by having Study Room Boxes or Unbound stalls at festivals and events.

**AC: The Live Art Development Agency has always had strong links with the US performance scene while also developing a network in Europe. In the past few years you have been participating in European festivals such as the Venice International Performance Art Week. Are there in your opinion differences in approach, practices and audience's receptions in your European experiences? I am thinking for example at the Venice Performance Art Week and at the concluded experience (at least in its form until 2015) of the Month of**

## **Performance Art-Berlin, in comparison for example to Performa in New York.**

**LK:** I think that the way they are structured and supported are different. Artists, curators, thinkers and writers, are the same in Europe and the US because they are likeminded people, and are all connected with each other in terms of thinking about what art can be or can do and why it is important. I think those things are sort of interchangeable, but the conditions in which artists are having to work are very different and I think in the UK experimental ways of working are increasingly more accepted to the point of a sort of institutionalization. The fact that there are so many academic courses and research and publishing projects related to performance is staggering compared to thirty years ago. The fact that Tate Modern opened Tate Tanks and even the way they are talking about the new building as a performative space and a place that people will experience reflects the institutionalization of performance. The Manchester International Festival, and other institutional frameworks now recognise and embrace the interdisciplinary experiential possibilities of Live Art, if not Live Art. Whilst there are courses in universities across the US, and performance studies began at NYU, there is possibly not so much happening at an institutional level beyond New York and Los Angeles. I think that is partly to do with the US funding model. It is just very challenging for artists and curators to generate funding for this kind of work.

Europe is slightly different, a lot of performance and hard-core Live Art initiatives are still very much artist-led. There is institutional engagement and great festivals but possibly not to the same extent as here in the UK and its much more artist-led in Europe than it is here.

One interesting thing that is happening within performance art, and this is going back to your first question, is that performance art when it first began – if one can say such a thing – came about as a sort of rejection of the dominance of the art world way of working. It was about rejecting the art market, rejecting the commodification of art, and anti-institutionalisation – it was about artists' experiences not about the market. What it is interesting is that, because there has been this huge resurgence of interest in performance art in the recent years, there is now a generation of young artists who are making performance art for the art market and I think that is happening increasingly within European, UK and US contexts (just look at the presence of performance in most major art fairs)

**AC:** Your ongoing project Restock, Rethink, Reflect has concluded its series about Live Art and feminism in 2015 and, if I am not wrong, 2016 will see the beginning of a two-year series of events, reflections and publications on Live Art and class. Do you think that the UK Live Art scene and its responses to the UK class system has been

**impacted by the arrival of migrants, refugees and the current debate about remaining or not in the EU? How? What are other LADA's projects in the pipeline for this year?**

**LK:** All these issues will inevitably come into that project but we are still at a very early stage. We had a Study Room gathering about it, that was really a broad ranging discussion about questions of privilege actually and whether Live Art is its own privilege.

Among the other projects we are working on in 2016, is *Playing Up* about Live Art and kids. For years there was very little relationship between Live Art and children but there has been more and more artists working with kids in interesting ways – more about art with kids than art for or about kids. There have been really fantastic projects like the one by Campo in Belgium, commissioning artists such as Gob Squad and Tim Etchells to make works with kids. So we have been doing a lot of work around that with colleagues in Live Art UK such as Contact Theatre in Manchester which has a brilliant policy of working with kids and young people at all levels including the selection of architects for the building and the appointment of its artistic director. *Playing Up* is a project with the brilliant German researcher Sybilla Peters and a collaboration with Tate Family programmes who see Live Art as a really effective cultural strategy for engaging children. *Playing Up* is a game that adults and kids play together based on Live Art approaches and referencing specific works. We'll be launching it in April at Tate Modern with a three day mass play in and a symposium on Live Art and kids. We particularly talk about our work as giving agency to underrepresented artists, communities and constituencies and have been doing work with older women artists in Restock, Rethink, Reflect on Live Art and feminism, so it is now exciting to do something around kids – its an exciting new territory for us.

There will be an other DIY programme this summer, we have a bunch of publications coming out this year, and more Live Online projects, including the continuation of the LADA Screens series we launched last year. We will be doing some online commissions and archival work digitising our resources and extending online access to the materials we hold. We are always looking forward and back at the same time – looking back into history but also investing in the future.

**Lois Keidan** is the Co-Founder and Co-Director of the , London. From 1992 to 1997 she was Director of Live Arts at the ICA, London. Prior to that she was responsible for Performance Art at Arts Council of England, and previously worked at the Midland Group, Nottingham and Theatre Workshop, Edinburgh.

**Some of the key resources linked to LADA's work:**

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

<b>LADA Study Room available resources</b>			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Pbl	Live: Art and Performance, 2004	Adrian Heathfield	P0553
<i>Further resources can be found on the section Study Room Resources Summary: #border and #europe</i>			
<b>Additional resources</b>			
DIC	'performingborders. art   crossings   Europe' Central Saint Martins, 2016	Organised by Alessandra Cianetti	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrTyi1Dwl-Y&amp;feature=youtu.be">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrTyi1Dwl-Y&amp;feature=youtu.be</a>

**Alessandra Cianetti:** Let's start from why you are here in London today 29th February. You are presenting the project *Gardens Speak* at the Battersea Arts Centre whose website describes it as 'an interactive sound installation containing the oral histories of 10 ordinary people who have been buried in the gardens of Syrian homes. Each narrative has been carefully constructed with the friends and family members of the deceased to retell their stories as they themselves would have recounted it.' *Gardens Speak* was first presented at Artsadmin in 2014 and then has been touring in Australia, the UK, Germany and Romania. Do you think the work and its reception has been changing over the years due also to the increasing exacerbation of the Syrian conflict?

**Tania El Khoury:** The show at Artsadmin was a preview of only two days just to test it out as the work is interactive, and needed to be tested with an audience. We had colleagues and friends coming to Artsadmin to see the work and from then we developed it further, taking into consideration people's opinions on the general experience, but also on technical stuff around the instructions because this show happens without a performer, and the audience activates the piece. The BAC shows are the first public opening in London and it runs from the 2nd to the 19th of March.

*Gardens Speak* has been touring and since last year it has been picked up more, and this is a work whose reception depends on the space and the place it is shown. There is a big interest in Syrian people's stories. I think there is a need for stories of individual people living in Syria. Therefore, some people feel that this piece is timely. I showed it in Munich where there is a huge population of Syrian asylum seekers; it felt relevant to show *Gardens Speak* there because many Syrians came to see it and engaged with it, but there were also many people from Munich who wanted to know more about the situation in Syria. The piece reminded us what and who is behind what in Europe is now called the 'Refugees Crisis'. How did people become refugees in the first place? This piece is mainly about the first periods in the Syrian uprising and tells the stories of people who participated in protests – whether they called themselves revolutionaries, activists or just normal people who were helping – and were all consequently killed by the regime. It is actually important to remember that. Since 2013, I had many interviews with people, activists, and artists from Syria and the ten stories that are part of *Gardens Speak* were mainly told to myself and the Syrian writer Keenana Issa by close friends and families of the deceased.

**AC:** This work is directly linked in terms of telling stories of Syrian refugees with the 2013 commission by Spielart Festival in Munich *Stories of Refuge*. An audio-video participative installation that 'tells

the story of three Syrian asylum seekers who fled Syria and sought refuge in Munich' after having paid a lot, both financially and emotionally, to be smuggled into Europe and risking their lives. As you describe it on your website, 'we gave each of the three participants a small discreet video camera that they smuggled into their camps, and asked them to film a day in their lives as asylum seekers in Munich'. Moreover, the audience was asked to lie on bunk beds and was also able to leave some notes and thoughts in black notebooks left in each bed. How did you involve the participants, and what was the value for them of being part of this project? How was the audience response to the piece?

**TEK:** I met various people in Munich and not all of them were keen to tell their stories for various reasons. Some people had just arrived and were worried about talking about what had happened to them and by that maybe endanger family members who are still in Syria. Others were worried about their legal status in Munich because in many situations there are details you focus on and others you might not tell to the authorities, the narratives you share with your friends are definitely different from the ones you tell to the authorities of the country you would like to be hosted by; there are various and conflicting narratives at play in these situations. In the end I worked with three people who were willing to tell us their stories. Their identity was hidden and it was an open process; they chose how to present their stories. We built a relationship with the participants, as they understood that I come first from a position of solidarity rather than from a journalistic approach.

When we presented *Stories of Refuge* in 2013 there was less attention on the topic as it wasn't at the centre of the public discourse. Members of the audience were really sweet leaving tips and suggestions to the refugees, telling them that they were welcome, and that Munich gets better with time. I think it definitely would have been different if the piece was presented now in Munich.

**AC:** Your exploration of the migratory condition started early in your career, let's think for example of your *Leave to Remain* piece of 2010, were you explored your own tale as an immigrant in the UK. In light of recent international developments in terms of people fleeing zones of conflict and border crossing, which are major themes your practice is addressing at the moment, how do you think your work has been changing over the years?

**TEK:** *Leave to Remain* was more of a personal story and using something autobiographical is quite different from talking about big numbers of people fleeing wars. You don't want to self-victimise and you want to be aware of your privileges, because at the end of the day I was able to be here and live here, study and get citizenship. Each piece really depends on the space and place it is presented. 'Stories of Refuge' definitely would

have been different if it was presented here in the UK and now. In the UK there is obviously what the government's stand is with the Home Secretary Theresa May's speeches that show a lot of pride in closing borders, and she is even calling for a change of the legal framework around refugee status. So my work depends on the context, the space and whose story I am telling.

I don't think that the passage from more autobiographical works to pieces such as *Gardens Speak* and *Stories of Refuge* is a change in my politics in terms of being against borders and being against discrimination over borders, but now there is more urgency in discussing this because people are actually fleeing wars in which a lot of these big governments are involved directly or indirectly. There is a human responsibility, a political responsibility and an artistic responsibility to respond from the point of view of the people telling their stories.

**AC: You are the co-founder of the Dictaphone group that, with your colleague researcher and architect Abir Saksouk, 're-questions, as citizens, the relationship to the space of the city, with a focus on public spaces'. How have notions of citizens and boundaries between public and private been addressed by the work of your group in its recent works?**

**TEK:** One of the last projects we have recently done is in collaboration with a local youth group and activists in Sidon, a seashore city in the south of Lebanon. We worked with local people's relations to the sea, which are significantly changing due to big governmental and private projects on the seashore and big construction projects.

The relationship between the Lebanese people and the sea is a common theme of many of our projects where we see access to the sea as a human right. This project we run with youth groups and activists was also about telling stories of spaces through people's past and current uses of public spaces on the seashore. We also opened questions about the future of these spaces, reimagining them and imagining how people's relationship with them might change because of the construction plans. We are also working on a city walk in Beirut called *Topography of Descent*, which took place in an area that has been experiencing urban transformation. The streets we took the audience through have old houses that are threatened by demolition. And the previously co-existing social classes will now change with the rise of skyscrapers. Again, we tell the stories of contested spaces and contested events through the stories of marginalised groups and individuals.

One other example of Dictaphone group's works around spaces and internal and external borders is *Nothing to Declare*, a research-based



lecture performance that explores borders within Lebanon, those between Lebanon and its neighbours, and across the Arab world.

**AC: On an image on your website there is a picture of a 2011 article you published in a Lebanese Newspaper called 'What is Live Art?' How would you reply now to that question? What is for you the value of Live Art interventions and performative installations in addressing the themes your political works talk about?**

**TEK:** My interest in Live Art is linked to my interest in interactivity; Live Art allows certain interactivity with the audience that makes the discussion of political issues easier as it invites people to be involved, to participate in an embodied knowledge, to bear witness, like in *Gardens Speak*. To take sides, even. I think this is where the politics happens, and that is my interest in Live Art as a form that is not confined to a studio or a specific setting and that can happen in public spaces, always allowing a certain interactivity. I also see the Dictaphone group's activities as Live Art, as research-based Live Art.

**AC: Talking about Live Art scenes, I wonder what you think have been performers' responses in Lebanon or Syria to the current situation. Are there any of your colleagues or any projects you would like to highlight?**

**TEK:** I cannot think of names at the moment but I would like to see more involvement by artists. I know that there are a lot of artists that are physically going to places such as the Calais jungle for example to support refugees and that is of course very much needed. But I feel that it would also be interesting to see artists engaging with local politics in their own countries, discussing or opening up questions about their governments' stands on refugees and also not taking them into yet another war. There is a lot of disconnection between what people and artists feel about borders, citizenship and refugees, and what governments are actually doing by closing off the borders, proposing changes to refugee status, which would be dangerous in the short and long term. I would like for this to be questioned and challenged in the arts. In Lebanon now probably half of the population is made up of refugees, so there is a lot of artists' work done in collaboration with them. I don't know whether they define themselves as Live Artists but there is a theatre group called Zoukak who have been doing work in collaboration with refugees. There are also Syrian theatre makers who do projects in refugee camps in Lebanon such as the playwright Mohammad Al Attar.

**AC: What are you up to this year? What are your coming projects?**

**TEK:** There is a work that I'm going to present in June at the Royal Court Theatre in London in which I am collaborating with a Palestinian Syrian

artist that is called *As far as my fingertips take me*. It is a one-on-one installation performance, a sort of conversation that takes place between an audience member and a refugee through a wall. It is a commission by LIFT festival 2016 and the Royal Court Theatre happening on 9, 10 and 11 June.

***Tania El Khoury*** is an artist working between London and Beirut. She creates interactive installations and challenging performances in which the audience is an active collaborator. Tania's solo work has toured internationally, and has been recognized with the Total Theatre Innovation Award and the Arches Brick Award. Tania is currently working on a practice-based PhD between the Departments of Drama and Geography at Royal Holloway College, University of London. Her research and publications focus on Live Art in the time of Syrian uprisings. She is the co-founder of Dictaphone Group, a research and performance collective aiming at reclaiming public space in Lebanon.

**To know more about Tania El Khoury's practice:**

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

<b>LADA Study Room available resources</b>			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Pbl	Gardens Speak, 2016	Tania El Khoury	P2938
Pbl	Stories of Refuge: Oral Histories of Syrian Asylum Seekers in Germany, 2014	Tania El Khoury	P2661
Pbl	Nothing To Declare, 2013	Dictaphone Group	P2662
Art	Bahrain: Access Denied, 2015	Tania El Khoury	A0636
Art	The Contested Scenography of Revolution, 2013	Tania El Khoury	A0578
DF	Gardens Speak, 2014	Tania El Khoury	EF5153
DF	Jarideh, 2013	Tania El Khoury	EF5154
DF	Nothing To Declare, 2013	Dictaphone Group	EF5156
DF	Maybe if you choreograph me you will feel better, 2011	Tania El Khoury	EF5155

**Alessandra Cianetti:** Núria, your work strikes me as a practice that consistently addresses the process of externally imposing individual and collective identities through political symbols, power structures, and national and international legal constraints. Your multi-disciplinary approach looks at how to devise methodologies that escape these predicaments. I would like to focus on three of your recent projects. Let's start from *Apátrida por voluntad propia. Sobre la prisión de lo Posible* (Stateless by choice. On the prison of the Possible, 2015). A journey into becoming a stateless person renouncing the very notion of citizenship, could you explain a bit more about the steps of this project and how you present it in art contexts?

**Núria Güell:** Like all my projects, this one emerges from a personal discomfort regarding the collective. Some of my previous projects consisted of subverting the immigration law. Specifically, in searching for ways to legalize people who are illegalized through this law, by relying on the socially acquired privileges I have for being a Spanish citizen, white, and an artist. This is a reality that speaks to me for various reasons. On the one hand, because of all the atrocities being committed at borders, and to top it all that are justified in our name, for "our security". On the other, this has affected me personally for many years because my partner is Cuban and, because he doesn't hold an EU passport, state officers who are alien to our lives get to decide when we can be together and when we cannot. Then I was invited to make a specific project related to the concept of Europe, and this is where the project *Apátrida por voluntad propia* (Stateless by Choice) originated.

This project stands against the structure of the nation-state as a mode of political organization and is based on my disidentification with the concept of nationality as a construction of the self in relation to the national identity, since I consider it fictional and imposed. This journey began in December 2014. I visited various immigration offices, the regional government office, and other state institutions explaining my wish to renounce Spanish citizenship, thus acquiring status of stateless. It was frustrating since no one had the answer or knew the procedure to achieve this, but at the same time it was very interesting to see how this simple proposition would generate confusion and chaos in their heads – it was something unthinkable for them. In a way, and surprisingly, they felt attacked! It was a question that put into crisis something "sacred" in their constitution as a person: their homeland.

They asked me how I dared to ask this when "everyone" wanted to be Spanish, and other similar questions. In my view, in that personal moment between the officer and me, the work was already taking place. In the end,

I sent a renunciation letter to the regional government explaining my reasons for relinquishing Spanish nationality, thus forcing them to undertake an investigation so that they could give me a written response. As a result of the negative reply I received from the State, I requested a lawyer to conduct a study of the Spanish and European legislation, which revealed that loss of nationality is only considered as a form of state punishment; the possibility that a person can choose to renounce their nationality is not contemplated. Then, taking as a point of departure Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – which states that *all human beings are born free* – I requested from the lawyer a second study whereby I exercised my individual right to self-determination with the aim of renouncing citizenship. The study showed that this right is considered only as a collective right in the process of the creation of another State or nation; in other words, this right only allows for the reproduction of the same structure. Both reports made clear to us what the State was unable to respond. The last thing they said was that they would refer my case to the Ministry of Justice; we are still waiting for a reply. Personally, I think that they don't want to grant me the status of a stateless person because it could set a precedent, particularly for many Catalans, but also for many other citizens with Spanish nationality who do not feel identified with the nationality that has been imposed on them.

In the artistic context I present my renunciation letter as well as all the legal conversations I held with the State, together with the legal reports drafted by the lawyer and the video footage and photos of my conversations with state officers, which were recorded on hidden camera.

**AC: The second project I am interest in tackles the increase in right-wing discourses in Europe focusing on the fascist symbols of Francoist propaganda: *Ideologías Oscilatorias* (Oscillatory Ideologies, 2015). From a brief video, I gather that was a public intervention that you recorded. Could you tell me a bit more? How both the people on the streets and Spanish authorities received the project?**

**NG:** This project was very interesting because it took place without actually being carried out. It is a project I worked on with the Cuban artist Levi Orta. At a formal level, it consisted of a white car decorated with fascist and Francoist motifs parked in a private car park near the central square of Figueras. Every two hours the car would have gone for a ride around the square and back to the parking lot, creating an uncomfortable presence and taking an absurd route. The project aimed at rethinking Franco's ideology and fascist attitudes today, which – like a ghost – haunt this country without memory. We consider it is timely and necessary to reflect upon the rise of fascism that manifests itself in different forms – from institutional policies that segregate and kill, to the multiple attacks by neo-Nazi groups, both in Fortress Europe and in our own homes. But the most interesting thing was that the city mayor, a representative of a

Catalan nationalist party, censored the project. This generated a Streisand effect in social media that made the project work even though the car never left the parking lot. At the same time, it resignified the project and made it more relevant. As the title *Ideologías Oscilatorias* (*Oscillatory Ideologies*) suggests: sometimes it is not only a question of ideology or the colours of the flag, but of the essence of power within old political frameworks. Levi and I are grateful to the mayor for her involuntary collaboration in the project.

**AC: At the beginning of this year you presented a really interesting ongoing project that blended fiscal disobedience and political activism: the *Troika Fiscal Disobedience Consultancy*, a tool based on the civil disobedience used by various independence movements that you devised in collaboration with Catalan activist Enric Duran. How does it work? Have organisations contacted you for consultations yet? How do you place this project within your trajectory as an artist?**

**NG:** We set up a small legal service, like any other, but in this case with a rebellious, disobedient nature. *Troika Fiscal Disobedience Consultancy* gives support to citizens and European collectives to enable fiscal disobedience to the Troika. We based our work on conceptual invoices. It's really simple: for example, let's imagine you are a Greek collective that does not want their tax to finance the Troika and would rather see that money be used for the common good. So, when it's time to do your taxes and you need to pay VAT to the state, let's say €1,000.00, you can hire our legal services. You just need to contact us via email, telling us that you want to be 'disobedient' for that amount. In this case, the price of our service, basically giving you advice through our email, will be of €1,000.00 plus 8%. We will make two invoices. The first one with the 8% that you need to pay us (1% of that is used to support the legal practice and the remaining 7% is transferred to a common fund to be used in emergency projects agreed by an assembly composed by range of European artists). Once you have paid the first invoice we will send you the second, for an amount of €1,000.00. The friendliness and solidarity that characterize our fiscal consultancy means we will never claim payment of the second invoice. In this way, you will be able to balance your VAT, resulting in €0 to be paid to the state, being able to use that money for projects and social services that austerity policies have annihilated. This is just an example but there are plenty more; I encourage you to contact our legal services if you want to pursue fiscal disobedience to the Troika. You can rest assured because our fiscal consultancy is registered with a very common name. This project is based on making use of market laws in the EU single market to subvert the inhuman concept that its leaders have of the Union.

Yes, many European citizen and organisations are contacting our legal practice. In fact, we have been open for a month and have had more interest than we could have imagined.

Within my work's trajectory, I understand it as a project forming part of an operational method that I call *Replica analítica crítica* (Critical analytical replica), which consists of replicating within the artistic space – the quintessential space for reflection – a phenomenon already present within the social and the political sphere. This framework acts as an augmenting lens allowing us to analyse from a critical perspective the nuances of what has been normalized in our day-to-day and through the activity of the media. In this case we use similar strategies to those used by the tax advisors of big neoliberal corporations in order to avoid taxes for their clients, but in this case we have the objective of reverting them to the common good. A good part of my projects and art work are citizens' resources that people can use and replicate. I also tend to use the space of visibility that art grants me and hand it over to others. In this case, somehow this is also fulfilled: the project amplifies the voice of many activists that are fighting through economic disobedience. In fact, they are now the ones managing the *Troika Fiscal Disobedience Consultancy*.

**AC: Your practice looks at how change can be implemented through interventions that cut into current societal issues and your projects seem to have an inner performativity in their realization and presentation to the public. I wonder what you think the role of performance is within your overall practice, and whether you see Live Art as a key way to respond to complex issues.**

**NG:** Yes, absolutely. I believe that it is only by living, the way we choose to be in the world, that we can trigger macro-political changes. Only through micro-political changes we can defy and change structures. Let me explain: even if macro-political ideas are brilliant, if we do not change ourselves, they will only be conducive to a rearrangement of the state of things. I believe the key is to displace the discourse of the Master, and with this I mean the colonial and capitalist unconscious with which we've been inculcated, the power devices that through law and morals amputate what is singular in each one of us, creating standardized desires that only respond to their needs. Only through this displacement can we force ourselves to reinvent reality and allow ourselves not to be subjected to the diktat of Integrated Global Capitalism. At the same time, I believe that if the problem is financial and macro-political, we need to devise responses at this same level, as for example what we are trying to do with *Troika Fiscal Disobedience Consultancy*. But this can only work if people become involved at a micro-political level, in this case using the service.

For me, the role of performance and artistic expression is to use the space of freedom that characterises art, through strategies and counter-devices, to engender moments of ethical enquiry that allow us to rethink ourselves as society. They need to open the ground for allowing critical distance,

displacing the discourse of the Master and questioning internalized identifications.

**AC: Your practice walks the border between art and activism, how do you balance these two aspects of your work? I noticed that Cuban installation and performance artist Tania Bruguera features among your mentors. How do you feel she influenced your thinking as an artist?**

**NG:** Yes, my stay in Tania Bruguera's pedagogic project in Havana, entitled *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (Behaviour Art School), is essential to understanding my current practice. Tania always told me: 'Todo por la pincha' ('Everything for the work')\*. She wanted to convey that if you do something, you take it to its final consequences, and I believed that for me this is a premise, both in my work and my personal life, that the borders are not clearly defined. This is why I say that the main medium I use for my work is my body: my physical, emotional and legal body. And when you work with that level of involvement that has not to do with the representation but with reality, your practice flows directly on the border of art and activism.

**AC: Along with the financial crisis started in 2008, the current refugees' crisis, and threatens to the Schengen agreement, the very project of a European identity seems to have failed. From your work we can see that you are definitely critical of this institutional approach to identity and I wonder whether you can recognise this feeling in other live and visual artists that are now working in Europe or about what is happening in Europe. Do you think that is there a response from the art world to this current issues? If so, which artists or projects would you look at?**

**NG:** Yes, in social media you can see many artists and intellectuals rethinking the concept of Europe from a critical perspective. Due to time constraints I am not following contemporary art responses closely. I am more focused on analysing those movement at an institutional level in order to be able to understand what the best response would be. In terms of referents, I am interested in psychoanalytic discourse analysis and decolonial contributions. From an active perspective, I am involved in activism, beyond my artistic practice.

**AC: To conclude please, tell us more about your coming projects this year, are you working on something new?**

**NG:** Yes, now I am working in a project of 'dis/un-nationalization' entitled *Rambo*. I have been invited to do a project in New York, as you know the US military gives motivational talks/conferences to students in high school to increase their recruitment. It is based on nationalist concepts such as loyalty to the nation, using it as a sacred cause to justify the unjustifiable.



My proposal is based on replicating the same talks, but in this case the speaker will be a veteran from the Iraq war, who has become an antimilitarist referent. The objective is to rethink the concept of homeland/nation with students from a critical perspective of collective engagement, far from irrational and uncritical principles that patriotism and nationalism frequently rely upon.

\**Pincha* is a Cuban expression referring to the work (labour) one performs. It is used invariably by artists and other workers.

**Núria Güell's** work analyses how power affects subjectivity through submission, specifically by established legality and hegemonic morality. Núria's resources for artistic intervention are based on flirting with established powers, complicity with different allies and the use of the privileges of the institutional art world as well as those granted socially for being a white woman, Spanish and European. Tactics that mingles with her own life develops in specific contexts, with the aim of cause a disruption in power relationships seeking a redistribution of enjoyment. She is graduated in Arts from the University of Barcelona (Spain), continued her studies in the Department of Behavioural Art in Havana (Cuba) under the direction of Tania Bruguera. Her work has been exhibited in biennials and museums of Europe, Latin America, Caribbean, Middle East and United States. She also collaborates with various self-managed social centres.

#### To know more about Núria Güell's practice:

Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview

Additional resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
DIC	'Crisis' in Excess: Performing Europe Today' - Winchester University, 2016	Organised by Inside/Outside Europe Research Network	<a href="http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2016/04/crisis-in-excess-performing-europe-today/">http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2016/04/crisis-in-excess-performing-europe-today/</a>
DfC	Catalogue of EURO   PHONIA exhibition, London, 2016, pp.45-55	Giulia Colletti and Maisie Linford	<a href="https://issuu.com/europhonia/docs/final_europhonia_catalogue">https://issuu.com/europhonia/docs/final_europhonia_catalogue</a>

**Alessandra Cianetti:** Helena, you have been working as a Live Artist for almost fifteen years now and your practice focuses on the relationship between power structures and the female body. The emarginated body, the subjected body but also the militant one seems to me the centre of your work. How this line of practice started, where do you think it is going?

**Helena Walsh:** My practice has always been informed by feminist concerns. Through my performances I attempt to positively violate the systems, borders and rules that construct gender. Through the use of the body in my performances, at once subjected and also militant, I explore the tensions between empowerment and oppression. In doing so, I attempt to make visible and provoke a questioning of the power structures that contain female sexuality, while simultaneously working towards activating forms of resistance that contribute to the development of feminist discourses. Given its lineage as a practice concerned with questioning institutional boundaries, I see Live Art as a particularly viable platform for such explorations.

My focus on the relationship between power structures and the female body within my practice emerged from my embodied experiences. This led me towards interrogating the regimenting of female bodies in accordance to societal expectations and gendered norms. For example, my very early performances, such as *Food for Thought*, *Body Mist* and *Tight Lipped Labia* were concerned with examining the construction of femininity and the pressures placed upon women to maintain patriarchal ideals of beauty. Later, on becoming a mother I began to examine the policing of the maternal body and the lack of adequate discourse around the actualities of maternal experience (from the joys, the monotony and the labour). These explorations also involve a consideration of the overt essentialising of motherhood in my native Ireland and the territorial control of the female body through the severe restrictions placed on access to safe and legal abortion services across the island of Ireland. This sparked a more in-depth examination of the relations between gender, national identity and cultural history in an Irish context within my practice.

Currently, I am focused on exploring the legacies of feminist activism and tracing the footsteps of feminist activists, both in an Irish context and within the London-Irish feminist community. For example, I am exploring the histories of those who were involved in the Irish suffrage movement, alongside feminist activists who fought in the 1916 Rising against British Rule. The Rising, which was followed by the War of Independence and Civil War, led to the formation of the Irish Free State (later becoming a Republic) and the partitioning of Ireland, with the six counties of Northern Ireland remaining part of the United Kingdom. Of course, this is a timely

exploration given that the centenary of the 1916 Rising is this year. Many of women active in the Rising held socialist and feminist principles and believed an independent Ireland would lead to the political enfranchisement of women. Notably, their involvement in the Rising was trivialized and negated within dominant nationalist narratives.

**AC: Duration is a key element of your work and in our previous conversations you see it as a fundamental characteristic of Irish performative works in general. Why do you think the relation between time and resistance is so important in both yours and Irish Live Artists' practices?**

**HW:** Live Art in an Irish context is a very diverse and exciting area of practice. While there are a number of different approaches and processes deployed by Live Artists, duration has been a significant feature of performative works on the island of Ireland since the 1970s. In particular, within an Irish context artists have used durational performance to create spaces where trauma and the difficulty surrounding its representation can be approached and thought. For example, in some of his early durational performances, Alastair McLennan, explored the traumatic impact and human cost of the conflict in Northern Ireland, commonly called 'The Troubles.' This conflict began in the late 1960s when tensions escalated between the nationalist-Catholic and unionist-Protestant communities following Civil Rights marches, which challenged the social inequalities experienced by the Catholic minority. The inflammation of longstanding disagreements over the political status of Northern Ireland, stemming from the partition of Ireland, led to a prolonged period of violence involving Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups, alongside British military and security forces. The violence of the Troubles was quelled with the gradual development of the Northern Irish Peace Process during the 1990s, which saw the establishment of a power-sharing system of governance representing both unionists and nationalists. The Peace Process coincided with a period of unprecedented economic growth in the Irish Republic, referred to as the 'Celtic Tiger.' This followed Ireland's joining of the European Union in 1973 and its attracting of foreign, largely American, technology and pharmaceutical companies to base their European operations in The Republic through implementing low-tax policies. The prosperity enabled during the Celtic Tiger era, however, was short-lived given the Republic of Ireland's economic collapse in 2010, which, of course, was related to the global economic crash in 2008.

Following the turn of the millennium there has been an increased use of duration by individual Live Art practitioners and within collective durational exhibitions across the island of Ireland. On one hand, the processes of repetition and duration allow an examination of a sense of sameness or repetition that pervades Irish cultural history, the continuation of oppression, violence and economic hardship. Of course, the long-standing

ceasefire and the development of the Power Sharing executive in Northern Ireland has quelled the extremity of the violence experienced during the Troubles and dramatically changed the political landscape. However, the Peace Process has been far from smooth and remains very much in process. The temporalities of durational performance, perhaps, allow space to engage with the development of this process across time and to approach the traumas of the past that continually haunt the present. The increased deployment of repetition and duration in contemporary Live Art is also significant to the recovery of a broader past that came following the progression of the Northern Irish Peace Process. As detailed in the Live Art Development Agency Study Guide, *Brutal Silences: Live Art and Irish Culture* co-authored by Ann Maria Healy and myself, a number of Live Artists have deployed the processes of repetition and duration to respond to the silencing of wide-scale institutional abuse. The occurrence of abuse within state-sanctioned Catholic institutions in the post-colonial Irish state entered into public discourse in the 1990s. The abuse of children by Catholic clergy within Industrial and Reformatory Schools, alongside the enslavement of women in Catholic-run Magdalen Laundries, which remained in operation until 1996 in the Republic, was suppressed for decades. The Irish state was complicit in the longevity of these abuses through sustaining these institutions and failing to intervene. Yet the implementing of a 'gagging' clause as a condition of state redress for those who suffered abuse demonstrates further attempts to silence and suppress. Human rights abuses also occurred in institutions in Northern Ireland, where Magdalen Laundries were also in operation and abuse in children's homes and residential institutions between 1922 and 1995 is being investigated as part of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse in Northern Ireland. Crucially, durational performance has been used very effectively to operate against the silencing of trauma within political discourses focused on narrating the past towards neat ends or a tidy conclusion. Live Artists have used the processes of repetition and duration to bring those bodies lacking resolution into view and encourage a questioning of how the traumas embedded in our collective histories continually trouble the present.

Within my practice I am interested in how durational performance can be deployed to draw connections across time so as to allow the historical conventions that continually police female sexuality to come into view and, in turn, be challenged. Through such explorations I hope to retrieve feminist acts of resistance negated or erased from dominant discourses that may resonate with contemporary feminist struggles. For instance, I am interested in how the retrieval of the voices of the women active in the 1916 Rising, largely undertaken by feminist historians, might be utilized in performance to invigorate current feminist campaigns in Ireland and challenge continued inequalities.

**AC:** Your investigations have been addressing notions of class struggle, migration, labour, and postcolonial discourses as we can see for example in the work 'Containing Crisis' that you performed at The National Famine Museum in Strokestown, Ireland. What is your approach to the relations among Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the city you live in, London? How have these reflections on geography and power struggles have shaped your practice?

**HW:** The exploration of class struggles, labour and migration within post-colonial contexts have been central to many of my projects in recent years. For example, in 2011, I was invited to make a performance at the National Famine Museum of Ireland, which is housed in the stables of Strokestown Park House, a former colonial estate in Co. Roscommon. Strokestown Park House is a Palladian-style mansion that was built by Thomas Mahon MP (1701-1782). The estate was built on lands given to Mahon's grandfather, Nicholas, in the 17th century for his support of the British colonial campaign. Estates such as Strokestown Park House are commonly referred to as the 'big house'. My performance, *Containing Crisis*, was durational, taking place over two days in the servants kitchen of the 'big house', which is the only remaining galleried kitchen in Ireland. With my excessive cooking and spoiling of potatoes during the performance I considered the relationship between shortage and surplus, evoked by the 'big house' and its controversial role during the Great Irish Famine (1845-51). The sense of excessiveness and abjectness within my actions responded to the enormity of the crisis provoked by the Great Irish Famine, which resulted in mass emigration from Ireland and the death of one million people from starvation and disease. The themes of surplus and shortage were also used to consider the sense of triumph inherent in the nationalist commemoration of the Famine during the Celtic Tiger era. The 150th anniversary of the Famine coincided with Ireland's economic growth during the 1990s and the commemorative events at this time greatly surpassed previous commemorative events. Relevant to this, the National Famine Museum opened in 1994.

In particular, the performance examined the relationship between the Famine and the Republic of Ireland's economic collapse in 2010. A soundtrack that played in the performance referenced the emigration of the starving Irish peasants to North America on the notorious 'Famine ships,' administrated from Strokestown Park House. These journeys often proved fatal, as already malnourished emigrants were packed into small cramped cabins and disease was rife. The soundtrack collaged the sounds of the sea, creaking ships and sea bells. These sounds were interrupted, at times, with the crackling of radio waves interspersed with distorted male and female voices saying the word 'contagion.' This soundtrack referenced the disease ridden famine ships that carried peasants from Ireland's shores and the discrimination experienced by emigrants on arrival in foreign contexts. However, it also brought into relief the emigration

from contemporary Ireland and the terming of the country as 'economic contagion' to the Eurozone preceding its acceptance of European Union (EU) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailouts. Of course, while emigration within an Irish context is often a necessity rather than a desired option, the ease of movement and greater opportunities open to contemporary Irish emigrants are markedly different to the hardships experienced by those who emigrated during the Famine. The performance, however, was pointing to the repetition of patterns of mass emigration as part of Irish history. In doing so, in the wake of Ireland's economic collapse it was highlighting the failure of Irish state to provide for its citizens following its adoption of neo-liberal values. This was heightened through my adoption of the role of 'Mother Ireland' dressed in a tricolour-themed costume reminiscent of a 1950's housewife. This played with the representation of the Famine through the figure of female body within nationalist narratives and also questioned the efforts to contain female sexuality in a post-colonial Irish context, following the implementation of a number of repressive laws post-independence that sought to restrict women to the duties of motherhood and the home. The resignation of women to the duties of the home is inscribed in Article 41.2 of the 1937 Irish constitution, which states that 'In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.' As I witnessed in the rural working-class environment where I grew up, women were often placed in a role of perpetual mothering and caring, rendered responsible for 'containing' the multiple 'crises' that occur within the homestead. My constant cooking activities in the performance appropriated and twisted the limiting of women to maternal and nurturing roles in a post-colonial Irish context to critique the Irish state's failure to regulate and manage the country's finances, which plunged the country into economic crisis.

Another project I was involved with called, *LABOUR*, focused on issues of gender and labour across three sites of geo-political relevance, London, Derry/Londonderry and Dublin. *LABOUR* featured eleven female Live Artists who are resident within, or native to, Northern and Southern Ireland. It was co-curated by Amanda Coogan, Chrissie Cadman and myself and was produced by Benjamin Sebastian of ]performance space[, London. *LABOUR* comprised of three durational live exhibitions, which occurred in sites related to work. The first exhibition took place in ]performance space[, London, a disused plumbing factory located on an industrial estate in East London, an area synonymous with migrant labour and of particular relevance to working-class Irish women, as evidenced by the strike led by women who worked in the Bryant and May match-making factory in 1888, many of whom were from the Irish community. It then toured to Void Gallery, Derry/ Londonderry, a former shirt factory that predominantly employed women. The final exhibition took place in The Lab, Dublin, located in the heart of 'The Monto, Dublin's historic prostitution district and in close proximity to one of Ireland's Magdalen Laundries. In each

durational exhibition the participating artists performed simultaneously for 8 consecutive hours. What was really interesting about this exhibition was how the artists began to respond to the histories of each site and this opened up discussion about gendered discrimination and exploitation across borders. From the curtailing of women's working rights, the confinement of women in the home, and enslavement of women in the Magdalen Laundries to the women who worked in the shirt-factories that were the main breadwinners in their families and the struggles experienced by migrant labourers. The exploring of these pasts sparked a consideration of continued gender-based exploitation related to labour and, in turn, the countering of such.

**AC: You are one of the founding members of the collective Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A., an intergenerational group of artists and activists that lobby for the right of Irish women to be allowed to have abortions; at the moment illegal practices in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Would you mind to talk a bit about the group's work and how do you interpret the relation between activism and political Live Art practices?**

**HW:** Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A. is a London-based direct action feminist performance group. The group is focused on challenging the severe restrictions placed on abortion services in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and campaigns for access to safe, legal and free abortion services globally.

Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A. is a non-hierarchical, intergenerational collective comprised largely, though not exclusively, of women originating from The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, including those who were active in the Irish Women's Abortion Support Group (1980-2000). We use I.M.E.L.D.A. as an acronym to mean – Ireland Making England the Legal Destination for Abortion.

The name Imelda was originally used as a code-name by the Irish Women's Abortion Support Group, a group of activists based in London who provided support to women traveling from Ireland to England for abortions between 1980 and 2000. The code-name was especially necessary between 1986 and 1995 when the Information Cases in the Republic of Ireland made it a criminal offence to travel abroad for an abortion and to provide information and referrals for abortion services. In reclaiming the name I.M.E.L.D.A. we wish to act in solidarity with women's groups who have sought to counteract the inhumanity of state legislation in both Northern and Southern Ireland, while operating against the silencing and shaming of women who have abortions. Up to 12 people travel everyday from the island of Ireland to England in order to access safe and legal abortion services. In the Republic of Ireland the 1983 8th Amendment to the Constitution, which legislates that the fetus or embryo has an equal right to life as the mother, restricts access to abortion.

Whereas, Northern Ireland remains exempt from the 1967 Abortion Act that is in effect in England, Scotland and Wales. Instead, the 1861 Offences Against the Persons Act is still in place in Northern Ireland. Apart from the considerable expense and stress of having to travel abroad for a medical procedure, those who can travel are denied follow-up after-care. The restrictions on abortion in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, concern issues of class, freedom of movement and highlight inequalities related to citizenship. For example, in 2013, the Irish Republic implemented a 14-year prison sentence for women who have abortions in Ireland illegally. This has consequences for those who take pro-abortive medication because they cannot afford to travel or are not permitted to leave the country. In April 2016, a young woman in Northern Ireland was given a suspended three-month jail sentence for taking the abortion pill. She took the abortion pill because she could not afford to travel to England and pay privately for a safe and legal abortion. Hence, we have a situation where some UK citizens are criminalized and risk imprisonment because they cannot afford to travel and pay for a medical procedure that is freely and legally available to other UK citizens on the NHS.

We are currently campaigning to have the charges against this woman dropped and to have the 1967 Abortion Act extended to Northern Ireland. We are also supporting the campaign in the Republic of Ireland to repeal the 8th Amendment. Over the last two years we have undertaken a number of direct-action interventions. Through our use of performance we seek to challenge patriarchal conventions and playfully subvert gendered cultural norms in an Irish context related to the restrictions on abortions, while operating against the silencing and shaming of those who have abortions. Similar to Live Artists we seek to raise questions around issues associated with identity and challenge the restrictions imposed by dominant norms by highlighting often overlooked or silenced realities. Relevant to the emergence of performance art from the 1960s as that which sought to break free of institutional confines and merge art with life, in taking to the streets and intervening in a variety of contexts we also seek to bring the very real issues impacting on women in Ireland, which are often silenced, into the public domain and to challenge institutional confines that maintain these restrictions.

Personally, I am interested in exploring the slippages that exist between the approaches, concepts and aesthetics used within feminist Live Art and feminist direct actions reliant on the central deployment of the body. Both feminist practices often involve an element of risk, the development of embodied gestures, alongside playful and innovative subversions of femininity. Equally, there is often an inventive appropriation or repurposing of the symbols, materials and objects associated with patriarchal constructions of femininity. Notably, the extent to which feminist acts of resistance and the political involvement of women in historical struggles are all too readily negated from history is prevalent and in my current



practice I am interested in uncovering less well-known histories of feminist resistance. Relevant to this, the threatened closure of the Feminist Library in London, which houses an extensive archive of feminist activism would be a great loss to both present and future generations.

**AC: Among your activities with Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A. and your work as a Live Artist you have been building an international network of solidarity for women. Could you tell me a bit more about this network? I was also wondering, with the current situation in Europe and the refugees' crisis for example, what do you think should be the role of political Live Art interventions? What artists can do? What in your opinion are artists among your networks doing at the moment to respond to this?**

**HW:** Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A., as a collective, has actively been establishing links and collaborating with pro-choice activists across the island of Ireland, within Britain and further a field. For example, we have worked with the activist collective My Belly is Mine, which successfully challenged proposed restrictions to abortion in Spain and we have worked with the Central American Women's Network (CAWN) as part of the Festival of Choice in London. Equally, through my involvement in projects such as *LABOUR* I am interested in the development of relationships across borders.

The development of feminist solidarity across borders is particularly significant to me, given that historically national tensions and conflict have limited the development of such relationships and, in turn, the strengthening of feminist movements. I am interested in maintaining forms of solidarity and resistance that rise above national divisions and break down borders. This is, of course, also relevant to the current situation in Europe with the refugee crisis, which is shocking, and all the more so due to the lack of an adequate response or compassion at a political level, particularly given that this is not the first time that we have witnessed people seeking refuge on mass due to conflict and oppression. The parallels between the desperation faced by the Irish in the past who endured harrowing journeys aboard the famine ships, which I just discussed, and the precarious journeys being made by contemporary refugees on unsafe and over-crowded boats, resonates with me. The enormity and excessiveness of the current refugee crisis in Europe mirrors that of past crisis such as the Irish Famine, and similar to in the past, political responses to this current crisis are inadequate. The derogatory language used by the British Prime Minister David Cameron to describe people in the Calais camp as 'a bunch of migrants' is particularly disturbing, alongside his concern with containing the crisis elsewhere and preventing it from breaching the UK's borders. This attitude is at complete odds with the views of many of the artists and activists within my networks. Many activists and artists, including myself, have been helping

in more practical ways where possible, for example, volunteering in projects aimed at collecting needed supplies for Calais or Greece. Two of the activists within Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A. have supported the No Borders Kitchen on the island of Lesbos, Greece. I have heard from them about the volatile situation on the ground there. Due to the urgency of the situation most people I know are prioritizing the provision of practical solidarity.

That is not to say that Live Artists should not respond by making political interventions that challenge the inadequate stance of governments in response to the refugee crisis, alongside resisting the moves to shut down borders and the negative characterising of refugees within political discourses. I certainly think that there needs to be much more dialogue around the current refugee crisis and what is happening on the ground across mainland Europe, particularly in contexts such as the UK and Ireland, where due to geographical distance, politicians attempt to frame the crisis as happening somewhere else so as to evade responsibility to take meaningful action.

**AC: Along your practice as an artist, you are also a researcher whose work focuses on Irish feminists and activists from the Sixties onwards: what have changed since then in your opinion on the ways activists are advocating for women rights? Are there practices that could be shared site-specifically in different country and still be effective?**

**HW:** Firstly, I would say that while there are certain differences and shifts in the ways activists advocate for women's rights, I particularly value working within an inter-generational network such as Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A. where older and younger feminist activists can share knowledge and learn from one another.

Certainly, I think that contemporary activism around women's rights is greatly informed by the actions and experiences of our feminist predecessors and, particularly, within Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A. our work is strengthened through intergenerational input. It is equally strengthened through the development of international solidarities and discussions with activists fighting for reproductive rights in different global contexts. One of the biggest changes in how activists are advocating for women's rights is perhaps through the use of social media. Feminist activists have been actively harnessing social media to build networks, share information, discuss issues, plan events and actions and also share documentation of interventions across sites and borders. In many ways social media makes it easier to organise and disseminate information quickly. However, I feel, at the same time, it is important to deploy direct actions and interventions in order to actively confront and unsettle oppressive power structures. There is a power in collective action and collective presence. Within Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A., alongside directly challenging politicians, we

have raised the issue of abortion at events associated with Irishness, for example St. Patrick's Day, The Rose of Tralee and the Irish State visit to Britain. In persistently intervening and inserting the issue of abortion into these events we operate against the hypocritical attempts of the Irish government to turn a blind eye to the exporting its duty of care towards its citizens to England and the fallacies in its claims that Ireland is 'abortion free.' Collective intervention has been effective in numerous campaigns for social justice and, in my view, remains so today.

**AC: To conclude, what are your plans for 2016?**

**HW:** I am continually involved with Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A. I am also currently devising a new site-responsive Live Art work that considers the activism of the women imprisoned in Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin following the 1916 Rising in relation to contemporary tensions between nationalism and feminism. This will feature in 'Future Histories' at Kilmainham Gaol in 2016.

***Helena Walsh** is an Irish Live Artist who has been based in London since 2003. Helena has performed widely in galleries, museums, theatres and non-traditional art spaces, including public sites. In 2009 she received a Doctorate Award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to undertake a practice-based PhD in the Department of Drama, Queen Mary University of London, which she completed in 2013. Over the course of her doctoral research, she used Live Art as a methodology to investigate the relations between gender, national identity and cultural history in an Irish context. Helena is currently devising a new site-responsive Live Art work that considers the activism of the women during the 1916 Rising, that will feature in 'Future Histories' at Kilmainham Gaol in 2016.*

### To know more about Helena Walsh's practice:

Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview

LADA Study Room available resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
Pbl	Chapter contribution 'Developing Dialogues: Live Art and Femininity in Post-Conflict Ireland' in Performance Art in Ireland: A History, edited by Dr. Áine Phillips, 2015	Helena Walsh	P2642
Pbl	Brutal Silences: A Live Art Development Agency Study Room Guide on Live Art in Ireland, 2011	Ann Maria Healy, Helena Walsh	P1661
Digital Link	Mapping Feminism, Contribution of artist's map to <i>Are We There Yet? – A Study Room Guide on Live Art and Feminism</i> , 2015	Helena Walsh	LADA website: <a href="http://www.studyroomguides.net/?page_id=293-helena-walsh">http://www.studyroomguides.net/ /?page_id=293 - helena-walsh</a>
Additional resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
Art	Contemporary performance art by Helena Walsh: embodiment as empowerment in an Irish context', 2016	Valérie Morisson, Université de Bourgogne - Dijon	Revue Miroirs [En ligne], 4 Vol.1 (2016).
Art	'Performing Processes: Live Art and Irish Culture', 2013	Helena Walsh	Contemporary Theatre Review: Special Issue on the Northern Irish Peace Process 23:3 (2013), pp.334 - 344.
Art	'Women's Art in Ireland and Poland 1970-2010: Experiencing and Experimenting on the	Valérie Morisson	Études Irlandaises, 37 :2 (2013).

	Female Body', 2013		
Art	'Gobsmacked: Getting Speechless in Performance', 2012	Helena Walsh	Contemporary Theatre Review: Special Issue on Live Art in the UK, 22:1 (2012), pp.161-166.
Art	'A Post- Patriotic Performance. Helena Walsh, Sinead McCann, Alex Conway, Right Here, Right Now, Kilmainham Gaol, November 4 2010', 2010	James Merrigan	Billion Journal, Part of Right Here, Right Now, Kilmainham Gaol, November 4, (2010).
DIA	'Producing Potentials for Empowerment', LABOUR 2012	Helena Walsh and Benjamin Sebastian	<a href="http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/producing-potentials-for-empowerment-labour-a-written-dialogue/">http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/producing-potentials-for-empowerment-labour-a-written-dialogue/</a>
DIA	'Helena Walsh - Magdalena Maria Wieckiewicz - Joseph Carr' at Right Here, Right Now, 2010	Magdalena Maria Wieckiewicz	<a href="http://performancelive.weebly.com/helena-walsh-magdalena-maria-wieckiewicz-joseph-carr.html">http://performancelive.weebly.com/helena-walsh-magdalena-maria-wieckiewicz-joseph-carr.html</a>

**Alessandra Cianetti:** Almir, you are the Co-Founder and Co-Director of Counterpoints Arts and your work has been focusing on 'developing creative strategies for making refugees and migrants' contributions become more recognised and welcomed within the British arts, history and culture'. How did your commitment and work with refugees start, and why?

**Almir Koldzic:** I can't think of one single point in time when I started being interested in displacement. But it must have started with books and literature. I do remember a moment during my studies in ex-Yugoslavia, where I am from, when I came across an excerpt from James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. He was talking about exile, about leaving what he called the traps of language, culture, religion, and I remember as a young man being really impressed by it, loving the sense of freedom and willingness to act and question the status quo that he was describing there.

A few years later, in 1995 I came to London to study English literature and wait for the war in Yugoslavia to end. My interest in exile and displacement developed in a more personal way at that point, and has continued to grow ever since.

My first professional experience in the field of arts and displacement was around an exhibition that I initiated while working for the Red Cross in 2005. The exhibition, entitled 'Insomnia' was inspired by the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers who we were seeing at the Red Cross at the time. We defined Insomnia as "the inability to access the place of rest, safety and recuperation". The idea was to invite artists from different backgrounds and experiences or imaginings of displacement to respond to the theme. We also wanted to invite different audiences to use their own experiences in order to relate to refugees and migrants. As part of this exhibition, LADA helped us develop an extensive Live Art programme. It worked on every level and marked the beginning of a long-standing partnership and friendship between our organisations.

Since 'Insomnia' in 2005, I have worked on a range of related projects, exhibitions and initiatives, including developing the identity and the strategy for the Refugee Week; setting up a network called Platforma Arts and Refugee Network; and most recently co-founding Counterpoints Arts – which is fully focused on engaging with refugees and migrants through arts and cultural programmes.

**AC:** Counterpoints Arts' mission is 'to support, produce and promote the arts by and about migrants and refugees, seeking to ensure that their cultural and artistic contributions are recognized and welcomed

**within British arts, history and culture.’ Counterpoints Arts follows three main strands: ‘enabling’, ‘producing’, and ‘learning’. How do these streams of projects work and intersect? What results do you think they have had so far? Are you happy with the way they have been ‘counterpointing’ the current public rhetoric about (/against) refugees’ voices and needs?**

**AK:** Counterpoints Arts was set up in 2012 and as such is a relatively young charity, although quite a few of the projects now sitting under the Counterpoints Arts umbrella go further back in time. For example, The Platforma project I mentioned earlier was set up in 2010; Refugee Week UK started in 1998 and so on.

What Counterpoints Arts enabled us to do was to create an agency dedicated to arts and cultural approaches to refugees’ and migrants’ experiences. This was important for us because in the past we were developing arts projects within different organisations, (e.g. Dublin Institute of Technology and Refugee Council), often happening on the margins of these organisations, as their missions were broader and less concerned with arts. By setting up Counterpoints Arts we were able to better define our vision and belief that arts has a huge role to play in the context of migration and integration – that it obviously has a capacity to delight and surprise but that it is also an incomparable way of telling human stories; of generating empathy; of reaching beyond policy- and advocacy-based work; of getting people to interact and communicate across difference.

Our three streams (‘enabling’, ‘producing’ and ‘learning’) work and intersect in a range of different ways. Principally, the enabling strand is about building infrastructure and networks across the country that can support emerging talent and new projects in this field. The production strand is about showcasing and “main-streaming” some of that work; and learning is about creating spaces for shared learning and improving practice. All of this is done with a big range of partners from across the country.

As to the question of whether we are happy with the results, of course there are great moments – exciting new artists and ideas; new projects, collaborations and events; feedback from audiences and funders – that make us happy and remind us why it is worthwhile to do what we do. But all of this is framed by a larger context, including by what is happening across Europe and Syria right now, which makes it difficult to linger on successes or indeed be sure about one’s achievements.

**AC:** In terms of artists you have been collaborating with, I can see that you have a wide range of contributors from many art practices and to go back to the focus of this blog, Live Art, I can see that you have been collaborating with Natasha Davis, the duo There There, and as

**part of dis\placed 2015 with Richard DeDomenici and the Live Art Development Agency on the panel 'Live Art and dis\placed' chaired by Lois Keidan. What do you think Live Art interventions add to the explorations, research and projects Counterpoints Arts run? What drove you towards this approach to addressing refugees' voices? Would you mind to telling me a bit more about the artists you have been working with?**

**AK:** We work in different ways and with different artists and we often work collaboratively.

One example is our collaboration with Richard DeDomenici, whom I met almost ten years ago, when he was looking for support for his refugee boy band project. At first I thought his idea was crazy, but after an introduction from Lois Keidan I had a few conversations with Richard, and we all then ended up working on what became the 'Fame Asylum' project and documentary by Channel 4. What I loved about Richard's approach is that it was brave, provocative and funny – which is not often the case with projects that relate to refugees. He also had a clearly defined audience – a young female demographic who like cheesy pop and who can influence their parents through pestering. I also loved the fact that Richard pissed off lots of people on both sides of the refugee debate – those who were protective and/or found his approach exploitative and those who were simply against refugees. He managed to provoke some great conversations and responses without ever offering a simple answer – including whether the project was a good idea at all.

We have also worked with and supported Natasha Davis for a number of years now. It has been great to see how her worked has continued to evolve while identity and migration have remained her great concerns and inspirations. Her approach to "participatory auto/biography" has opened all kinds of wonderful conversations and responses at our various events where she has performed. She also has a beautiful way of talking about and interweaving her art and exilic experiences – to the extent that we find her a great ambassador and model for emerging artists.

In terms of other art forms, we have done a few projects where more established British artists were brought to collaborate and perform with emerging artists from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Last year, for example, we organised an event at RichMix featuring Akala, who is quite an eloquent and well-spoken UK hip-hop artist who has quite a big following among young politically engaged people. He performed with a Palestinian band Katibeh Khamseh and that really worked. It was a huge deal for Katibeh Khamseh, who were suddenly performing to an audience of four hundred young people in London.

We also work with artists through commissions – for example we commissioned architect and artist Natasha Reid to develop her 'Embassy



for Refugees'. It ended up being a structure she built on the Southbank, by the river, where we organised a range of conversations and performances, including the launch of the annual UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) report.

We have also just commissioned our first six-month residency, a collaboration with the Royal Holloway University of London and Kayo Chingony, a writer and spoken word artist and DJ who will be using the residency to produce new work around themes of migration and activism.

Going back to the Live Art aspect of our various events, including 'Insomnia' which I mentioned earlier, there was always a clear sense that Live Art performances were bringing a new dimension to the event. It was literally about enlivening it; about bringing and engaging audiences, inviting them to take part in an experience; about bringing down barriers, as most often there is no stage or barrier between you and the performers. Which means that you have to do something, to act in order to either engage or ignore.

I will generalise here but I find that Live Art has a great potential to develop and embody different ways of telling the stories of refugees and migrants and to engage new audiences in the creative process of "representing" these experiences.

However, as non-experts in this field, we do rely on the support of experts, and it has been our great privilege to work over the years with LADA, who have become our trusted partners and friends over the years.

**AC: The second focus of performing borders is Europe. 2015 has been the year when the migratory movements towards Europe of people fleeing wars have been labelled the 'Refugees Crisis'. We have the Jungle in Calais, the debate about Brexit, queues of people hoping to be granted asylum in the UK. In your opinion, is there a co-ordinated response by arts organisations to addressing this crisis or do you think is more a matter of single artists' practices or arts organisations' projects that are actually addressing this issue? What are some interesting realities in terms of both artists' practices and arts organisations in Europe at the moment for you?**

**AK:** As far as I know, there isn't a co-ordinated response by arts organisations even though there are lots of conversations about it. More co-ordinated efforts do exist in the advocacy, human rights and policy-based fields, where there is a better-developed infrastructure. But in terms of the arts world, it is much less organised. As far as I can see a lot has been done by individuals, responding spontaneously and often quite beautifully and innovatively, with lots of passion.

In the UK context, there is Platforma Arts and Refugees Network, which brings together groups and individuals interested in refugee-related arts.

This is a project that we are running and collaborating on with a range of smaller arts organisations from across England. One aspect of this project is the biennial festival that brings together artists and practitioners from across the UK and increasingly internationally; the most recent edition of the festival took place in November 2015 in Leicester.

Another platform worth mentioning here as it has lots of creative potential is Refugee Week. It is open and democratic in the sense that we do not curate or decide what happens there. As the organisation that directs this initiative on the national level and on behalf of the Refugee Week partnership, what we do is provide resources and an overall framework and theme – inviting people to respond to it in their own creative ways.

We have seen that recently many more (arts) organisations and individuals are choosing to do something in relation to refugees – to what many people consider to be one of the defining issues of our time. This was especially obvious at our recent Refugee Week conference that attracted an unprecedented number of people interested in doing something in this context. There is also lots of interest this year from various European countries to join in and organise their own Refugee Weeks – which we are keen to support and see happen.

In terms of Europe, there is currently a lot of interest in knowing what is happening there; in developing cross-European links and working with people who are doing something particularly on the ground – Calais or the Greek islands are obvious examples. Many artists are going to places where refugees are arriving to do some sorts of interventions, which are often not clearly defined as art because some of it becomes about humanitarian support and responding to people's needs. There has been that merging of artists and social change.

Speaking of which, last year we co-commissioned in collaboration with the Victoria & Albert Museum a piece by a wonderful Syrian/German artist, Manaf Halbouni, which was originally commissioned for the last Venice Biennale and was partly chosen because of Manaf's involvement with the anti-Pegida movement in Dresden. The piece / outdoor installation was called 'Nowhere is Home' and it was a car that was full of belongings seemingly hastily loaded – his comment on Syrians having to pack their lives and leave – which we positioned at the Southbank Centre and then at the V&A.

So, I guess there are many other artists and projects around Europe commenting on, responding to and exploring related themes. There is one project in Sweden (LIVSTYCKET) that is using an interesting approach. They focus on recently arrived refugees and help them develop language skills. In the process, refugees are also involved in creative design activities – they draw, write, design, print, etc. – after which their creations

are given to professional designers and turned into bags, T-shirts, and so on. I like this approach because it addresses practical needs in combination with the development of creative skills.

Finally, I can say that so far this period has produced the biggest interest I have ever seen on the topic. What will come out of this is a big question, but I hope that cumulatively all this work will lead towards some sort of change, some sort of new openness. But it is too early to say.

A lot of proposals we receive are from people or arts organisations who are engaging with refugees for the first time, so a lot of work is tentative and safe. However, what is “radical” about this moment is that all these artists and organisations are choosing to address and talk about this issue. Not long ago it was politically contagious or heavy, and people felt they shouldn’t be getting involved and that they should not mix their “art” with social engagement. Now that has changed – and that is radical.

**AC: To conclude, what are the plans for Counterpoints Arts for 2016?**

**AK:** A few highlights for this year include events at the Southbank Centre, the British Museum and RichMix. We are also looking at commissioning and working with some fantastic artists operating both nationally and internationally. And later in the year, in October, we are going to organise an Arts and Social Exchange in Dartington, which is very exciting because it will be about bringing a number of people from different sectors and worlds together to discuss the ways art and social change can intervene and work in the context of migrants and refugees. We are exploring possibilities for commissioning more artists to work across the country, but that’s the beginning of our conversation. And obviously from 20th to 26th June there is Refugee Week, whose theme this year is ‘welcome’, celebrating the incredible acts of welcome shown to refugees by communities and individuals across the UK and Europe.

***Almir Koldzic** is a Co-Founder and Co-Director of Counterpoints Arts. He has worked for over 12 years on developing creative strategies for engaging with refugee and migrant experiences. His experiences include leading on the development of a national strategy and identity for Refugee Week UK; initiating the Simple Acts participatory programme; developing Platforma – national arts and refugees networking project; curating and producing events, exhibitions and commissions; and developing lasting partnerships with a big number of organisations across the country, ranging from mainstream cultural organisations and inter/national NGOs to smaller arts organisations and community groups. His passion is literature. He has studied English literature (BA), Anthropology (MA) and Creative Writing (MA).*

**To know more about Almir Koldzic's work:**

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

<b>LADA Study Room available resources</b>			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Pbl	Counter Point Multidisciplinary Art Event, 2011	Almir Koldzic and Branislava Kuburovic	P1799
DVD	Fame Asylum, 2006	Richard DeDomenici	D0838
DVD	Performing Rights Collection - London - Fame Asylum, 2006	Richard DeDomenici	D0551
DF	Fame Asylum, 2011	Richard DeDomenici	DB0062

**Alessandra Cianetti:** Natasha, I would like to start our conversation by asking you to briefly introduce a body of work you realised between 2009 and 2013: *Rupture*, *Asphyxia*, *Suspended*, and *Internal Terrains*. They started from the geopolitical situation in ex-Yugoslavia during the 90s, addressing your personal story and wounds. In your article 'Staging an Exilic Autobiography'<sup>59</sup> you describe this as a point of departure that – through repetition and memory – become a political act 'performed through cataloguing the loss, resolving the ambiguity of the experience and speaking out about the invisible and the unreachable'. Would you mind describing the origins of this body of work and the way it interprets your status of 'exilic artist'<sup>60</sup>?

**Natasha Davis:** I started making the trilogy of *Rupture*, *Asphyxia* and *Suspended* in 2008, approximately ten years after basing myself in the UK, or roughly fifteen years after the civil war started in former Yugoslavia in the 90s. Towards the end of the first year of the armed conflict in Yugoslavia, I managed to emigrate by crossing the last border that still remained open, the border with Greece. I remained six years in Greece in a precarious situation, during which time I was also engaged in a legal fight for citizenship. Being of mixed Serbian and Croatian background, as the country was falling apart and its federal republics emerging as separate states on the European landscape, neither Serbia nor Croatia were initially willing to recognise me as their citizen. It took a number of years to pick up threads of my arrested life, to disentangle the mess of interrupted plans for work and studies, and for the experience of living in limbo, as a displaced citizen, to settle, so that I can feel and be in a sufficiently safe place to be able to start 'looking back'. My art work is based on research but grounded in autobiographical experiences – when these experiences are disturbing to remember I need to develop strategies how to approach that material and ensure that I am in a relative place of strength when working with those memories.

I started making *Rupture* when I was diagnosed with cancer, during the months when I had to make decisions on what kind of therapy and interventions to choose, and then later during the initial six-month recovery. From the first biopsy onwards, I worked with my doctors and surgeons to document the process. I obtained a beautiful collection of surgical instruments to create an interactive hanging installation, and made a film of a large piece of meat being manipulated by my hands in surgical gloves and long prodding needle-like instruments. I travelled back to

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- Natasha Davis and Yana Meerzon (2015), *Staging an Exilic Autobiography*, *Performance Research*, 20:5, 63-69

- Silvija Jestrović in Natasha Davis, *Performance, Film, Installation* (London: Natasha Production, 2013)

Serbia and filmed ruined civilian buildings in central Belgrade as a result of the bombings by NATO to put an end to Slobodan Milosevic's political and military strategies. I documented the ceremony of becoming a British citizen. So *Rupture* became an intermedial research into the decay of the body and decay of the land I came from, and a story of renewal and regeneration, all in the context of the issues around exile and migration, cancer and what impact such experiences may have on the body and memory, from a very personal angle.

I conducted research for *Asphyxia* in South America at high altitude where it was difficult to breathe. As the name of the performance suggests, it focuses on the real and metaphorical situations in life which may lead to suffocation, whether it be due to personal or social life, traumas from the past, memory of abuse, or the stress related to crossing borders. In *Suspended* I wanted to explore the state of being out of balance, both physically and metaphorically, and experiment with sharing the performance space with the audience. In the performance, the audience move with me from one installation to another, as if on a migratory journey.

*Internal Terrains* continued on these themes but, as opposed to the trilogy in which I started the exploration through the body and memory, here I approached the material via objects and space. Memories were not excavated and shared with audience through travelling back and forth in time any more, but rather through geographical locations, maps, train journeys, addresses of temporary homes, rooms in a house – in an architectural sense. While I was making it I drew architectural plans of the homes I occupied and thought about shapes, doors, windows and objects I remembered from those spaces. When I paid attention to time, I wasn't interested in 'when' but in 'how long'. That's why I didn't use clocks or specific time references but metronomes, salt dripping from a bag, repetitive and cacophonous sounds produced on a violin, and similar devices. As a development of the idea of the body as home and as a site of memory, as explored in the trilogy, in *Internal Terrains* I was interested in what else can function as home when in transit, when in-between and in migratory situations and locations.

**AC: Through your work, you walk and cross borders among media, private stories and international tragic events, internal and external emotional and physical landscapes. What other boundaries do you think your practice crosses? Where do you see Live Art sitting within your multi-disciplinary work?**

**ND:** It's true that the work I make is interdisciplinary and that live performances usually involve text, choreography, video, original sound and other tools. I'm also very interested in extracting installations out of my live performances so that they can be experienced in galleries and occasionally re-worked in these new environments to implement yet

another live or participatory element. By employing this process I am experimenting with the physical defragmentation of the performance material and transforming it into something else, which resembles the process of bodily integration into a new environment, when displacement gradually gives life to a new form of existence for a migrant.

But the work is also cross-disciplinary and, as you noticed, often political – autobiography and personal histories are grounded in political contexts. In terms of methods of working and inspiration regarding content, images, ways of thinking – I am constantly excited about reaching towards other disciplines such as social and political studies, human rights issues, medical science etc. I already mentioned collaborating with doctors in the process of making *Rupture*. In *Teeth Show*, which I made after *Internal Terrains*, I collaborated with two dental clinicians and a maxillofacial surgeon to record a jaw operation on film. Starting with teeth as a metaphor for roots, *Teeth Show* explores complexities around democratic rights of the displaced body in transit and in a constant flux between breaking and repairing. It asks how crossing borders and living in exile impact on the rights of the body regarding its identity, citizenship and medical status. It is a mixed-media, playful and harrowing examination of who, and across what borders, may have access to beautiful and pain-free teeth, and what options remain to those in precarious or transient situations and those who are left out.

Live Art provides an excellent space for these interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary conversations and experiments, and allows me to work flexibly between various art forms such as performance, installation, film and publication – solo and collaboratively, with professionals or with participants who have never performed, in end-on seating or immersive configurations, in traditional performance environments and site specific locations, with art and science partners. Live Art and contemporary performance allow for research and embodied experience to mix organically and for new working methodologies to emerge from this mix.

**AC: Looking at your work and also the difficult choice to acquire the British citizenship (*Rupture*, 2009) after years of exile, made me think of two artists that have been touching notions of citizenships, displacement, and belonging connected with personal autobiographical choices: Mona Hatoum and Núria Güell. In her solo exhibition at Tate Modern (2016), we can see Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988), a video-work of the artist's mother taking a shower with a soundtrack of the letters the artist received from Beirut. For Hatoum her personal relationship becomes a way to speak of 'exile, displacement, disorientation and tremendous sense of loss as a result of the separation caused by war'. Spanish Live Artist Núria Güell, in her ongoing project 'Stateless by Choice', is following various legal and research steps to get rid of her own citizenship. Güell aims to**

**acquire the ‘stateless status’ to stand against both ‘the structure of the nation-state as a mode of political organisation’ and the fictitious ‘construction of the self in relation to the national identity’. I wonder how you relate to Hatoum’s work and in which way you would respond to Güell’s.**

**ND:** I think the work I make definitely relates to both artists and certainly Mona Hatoum’s installations have occasionally provided direct inspiration. For example the lighting installation that is central in demarcating the performance space and the idea of home in *Internal Terrains*, consisting of twenty cables with a light bulb at the end of each, comes from Hatoum’s *Undercurrent* (2008), the difference being that I walk on the cables throughout the performance, however uncomfortable or unbalancing that may be, and interact with the bulbs. Considering we both experienced exile with all the pain and pleasure associated with it, in the way that Said, Lamming and Sebald have written about, it is not strange that a lot of the imagery we use can appear dangerous or threatening and beautiful or poetic at the same time, drawing attention to the loss and liberation in equal measure.

All three of us make work that is both personal and political, however I think Núria Güell’s work, at least the work I am familiar with, is more directly political and activist in its nature. She also taps into the ideas around mobility and the ease or hardship with which citizens of different countries travel, which is something I have also looked at. In *Asphyxia*, one episode compares what it is like to cross borders with a Croatian passport and a British passport and asks why that is the case, considering that I am still the same person, regardless of the passport I use. Hatoum, Güell and I have made work that directly relates to the question of citizenship and crossing borders, and perhaps my *Citizenship* film that appears in *Rupture*, as you suggested, best illustrates shared research interests with these two artists.

The film starts with the documentation of my ‘becoming British’ ceremony. In the first part of the oath I pledge that ‘on becoming a British citizen I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, her heirs and successors, according to law’. During this, the real visual recorded documentation of that event is what the audience watch. In the second part of the oath, I pledge to ‘uphold [the United Kingdom’s] democratic values, observe its laws faithfully and fulfil my duties and obligations as a British citizen’. But in this part of the film we don’t see the ceremony in the Town Hall any more, but the bombed buildings in Belgrade. When my oath is completed, my voice is replaced with wailing Serbian women’s voices against the background of the war-torn buildings. Finally, this is succeeded with the images of an organ extracted from the human body, my body, a uterus, dissected for cancerous cells – the camera is focused on it, as I am interacting live with it on stage, as part of



a ritual projected on screen. Thus the connection between the trauma of the body (individual) and the trauma of the land (collective) is directly established in the work. The parasitic nature of the cancerous cells spreading in the body, threatening to take over and destroy it, also relates to the spread of the dark, nationalistic, horrific events throughout the land, eventually destroying it, breaking it into pieces. The metaphor of the parasite can be extended to how exiles are perceived by the countries hosting them. Refugees and other unwanted migrants are often perceived as a threat, multiplying and spreading through the host country at a speed difficult to control.

But the film also raises a series of questions around the citizenship itself. What does it mean to live in a country, work and pay tax, but not be able to vote or not feel safe about your legal status? How does it feel to become a citizen of a country, be able to vote and feel safe, but disagree with that country sending bombs that are falling very close to where your family lives? What does it mean to pledge both to the Queen and to democracy in one single, very short, oath? If the country decides to go into a war, which majority of the public does not seem to wish to happen, where is democracy? I made the film ten years after the NATO bombing of Belgrade and other places in Serbia, and just a few years after the military intervention in Iraq. The latter military intervention was executed after one of the biggest mass demonstrations against it ever in the UK. Now of course we've had it confirmed by Chilcot inquiry that the war was not necessary at the time, as the peaceful options had not been exhausted first, in addition to a dozen other very serious reasons.

**AC: In *Rupture*, *Asphyxia*, *Suspended*, and *Internal Terrains*, the body with its parts (i.e. mouth, hair) and functions is the site of an exploration of memories, ruptures, endurance, resistance, and pain. In *Suspended* you also put yourself in a position of fragility asking the audience to free you from the initial set-up of the performance in an act of building trust with strangers to whom you bestow your safety. In this relation between trust and vulnerability, how is the audience engaged? How does the public react? What do you want to build with them?**

**ND:** The imagery, even when disturbing, is often poetic and beautiful, at least in an abstract way, and never there to shock. For example, in *Suspended*, the meat minced through a grinder onto the white tablecloth, is used as a dramaturgical tool and speaks directly, in the context of the whole performance, of how grinding the process of exile and establishing oneself legally in a new country can be. It's a very powerful, succinct and visceral shortcut that can illuminate the difficulty of such a situation. As you mentioned, I am in a very vulnerable position at the opening scene of *Suspended* – I am stuck, raised on a high structure, with all my hair tied with more than 40 strings to theatre rigs, and if I were to fall all my hair

would be unrooted from my scalp. When the audience are silently invited to cut my hair in order to free me into movement, everyone in the space becomes hyper aware of what it is like to be stuck, in limbo, and how carefully we need to 'work' together so that nobody gets hurt. The audience sometimes start cutting my hair immediately, sometimes it takes a little while, but they are generally very careful, although there have been cuts when the hair took longer to grow back! Strings are left to hang in the space amongst the audience, with bits of my hair attached to the bottom of each – evoking the sensation that if someone is displaced from their original environment a piece of them will always stay behind.

Exposing vulnerability and placing myself out of balance in the performance space, and sometimes entrusting myself to the audience, so that at least certain moments in the performance are always new and unpredictable for me as much as for the audience, can be useful for the themes I explore. These devices also enhance intimacy, help erase 'the border' between the performer and audience, and create a ground for the possibility of more meaningful exchanges. If the material can move and provoke the audience, it means that they needn't have necessarily experienced exile in order to understand what it may be like to go through such a difficult experience.

I wish to provide the time and space for encounters with the audience, the time and space in which temporal and geographical, fragmented and associative journeys, as well as experiences of losses and transformations can be shared. In that sense the fragmentary nature of my work is also a deliberate choice, not just a device referring to the way our thoughts return to the past in which the displacement occurred. The fragments themselves are arranged in such a way that the audience can emotionally connect themselves to the material explored. In the trilogy the body of the performer became the material signifier to which the audience attached itself, whilst in *Internal Terrains* the objects as mnemonic devices became the main tool connecting to and tapping into the recipients' own experience of loss, allowing us to look together for resolutions by examining the wounds under the scars.

**AC: During your long and productive career, you have been collaborating with organisations such as Counterpoints Arts that focuses on the contribution of refugees to the British cultural scene. Would you mind saying a bit about your approach to this collaboration?**

**ND:** Collaborative ways of working with partners and commissioners are really important to me and I have been lucky to form excellent and meaningful relationships with several partners and funders in the UK and internationally throughout my career, which has allowed me to experiment and my practice to grow in a supportive environment. Counterpoints Arts

have been significant in this process in many ways. My research and their brief as a national organisation are extremely compatible and that has ensured that both politically and creatively we are on the same page. From the very beginning I realised that Counterpoints Arts really understood my work well: how I work, the issues I am interested in, the layers, how I communicate with the audience – that level and depth of understanding rarely happens and when it does it is very enriching for both sides and it ensures that we can learn from each other. There have been times when I benefited from their advice, from their knowledge of networks that I haven't thought about, their mentorship and producing skills. As a small organisation they are incredibly prolific and supportive of a whole army of artists working around the issues related to migration and exile. I think we are also very attracted to each other's interdisciplinary ways of thinking and working across genres. In the last few years they have commissioned two of my installations, a new participatory version of *Internal Terrains* in Leicester, several workshops and masterclasses, we did a Learning Lab together at Durham University and numerous public talks, plus I am represented in their amazing *Traces Project* featuring migrant artists who contributed to the cultural landscape of the UK – all of this has been both important and enriching. As a member of audience and a member of a larger network of artists I have attended many events and conferences they organised, and this has provided a space for working and thinking around the current refugee situation in Europe and further in a more organised, strategic and connected way. Their latest Refugee Week has just been enormous, the richest one ever.

All of the above for me as an artist is very important, as it means that I can preserve my individuality and creative freedom whilst at the same time not feel isolated in the issues that I explore. My creative performance, film and installation work is personal and poetic, and not necessarily directly political and activist, although it does become such in collaboration with an organisation such as Counterpoints Arts, especially through platforms, talks, workshops, conversations with public, and writing. Working with Counterpoints Arts has also been one of the ways for me to take my recent scholarly research out of the context of academia and into the realm of public conversations about socially engaged, collaborative and participatory practices. And I look forward very much to collaborating further with them on mobilising forces to keep drawing attention to how Europe can deal with the current situation and support migrants and refugees.

**AC: Please tell us a bit more about your plans for this challenging and uncertain year for Europe-based artists.**

**ND:** A new version of my *Teeth Show* has been commissioned by Science Gallery for their exciting Mouthy season and it will be a participatory version, I will be working around the ideas of crossing borders, roots and

teeth with dental clinicians. The performance is on 22 November this year. Before that *Teeth Show* is going to Minneapolis in the USA and I'm proud that this performance has travelled to all five continents, just this year I have performed it in Canada, South Africa and Australia, last year in India, prior to that in the UK.

Whilst in Melbourne with the British Council and Arts Council support earlier this year, I started developing new performance material with director and writer Alyson Campbell, this will also be a collaboration with a stem-cell scientist and a martial artist choreographer, as well as my usual team of artistic collaborators (Lucy Cash, Bob Karper and Marty Langthorne). I will be developing it in London, with the material unrolling gradually for the audience from next spring in collaboration with Rich Mix and Colchester Arts Centre, who have also been my significant partner venues for years. Partly I will also be working on it through a residency just out of Stratford-upon-Avon, generously provided by Hosking Houses Trust.

My documentary film Berlin-Sarajevo, which I have been making with a Berlin based artist and film maker Nehra Stella, is currently in post-production and I am hoping for it to be available to public from next year. Using the context of the split of Germany into Eastern and Western parts and its consequent re-unification/fall of the Berlin Wall, as well as the war in the Balkans and particularly the history of Sarajevo since the early 90s – the film explores how it is possible that we sometimes feel as foreigners, displaced in our own cities and countries, even if we have never left them.

Finally, I have prioritised taking part in public conversations related to arts and migration. Recently I have joined conversations at Tate Liverpool, Somerset House, Christie's, Camden People's Theatre and numerous universities here and in Toronto, Montreal, Melbourne, Sydney etc – I will continue to do so as part of various platforms and in collaboration with students, arts organisations and NGOs, academia, artists and general public, as the current pressing questions around refugee and migration status in post-EU-referendum UK, as well as in the wider European socio-political situation, make it very urgent to engage with as many partners and in as many positive actions and conversations as possible.

**Natasha Davis** is a performance and visual artist creating work that explores body, memory, identity and migration. Her performances, films and installations have been presented at theatres, galleries and festivals in the UK (National Theatre Studio, Chelsea Theatre, Birmingham Rep Door, Barbican Plymouth, Playhouse Derry, Capstone Liverpool and many others) and internationally in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Germany, Spain, Serbia, USA, Australia, India, Canada and South Africa. Her research has been funded by Arts Council England, British Council, Transatlantic Fellowship, Humanities Research Fund, Tower Hamlets, and numerous commissions

*and residencies. As producer Natasha has collaborated with artists such as Guy Dartnell and Marisa Carnesky and organisations such as Chisenhale Dance Space. She has performed with Pacitti Company, Blast Theory, Tino Sehgal and others. As curator most recently she created the cultural programme for the International Federation of Theatre Research in 2014. Natasha holds a doctorate from the University of Warwick and delivers lectures, talks and workshops across the world, from Buffalo to Tokyo to Grenoble to New Delhi.*

**To know more about Natasha Davis's practice:**

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

<b>LADA Study Room available resources</b>			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Pbl	Natasha Davis: Performance Film Installation, 2013	Natasha Davis	P2119
DVD	Suspended, 2010	Natasha Davis	D1538
DVD	Suspended, 2010	Natasha Davis	D1842
DVD	Rupture, 2009	Natasha Davis	D1250
<b>Additional resources</b>			
Pbl	'Staging an Exilic Autobiography. On the pleasures and frustrations of repetitions and returns', 2015	Natasha Davis and Yana Meerzon	Performance Research, Volume 20, Issue 5 (2015), pp.63-69

**Alessandra Cianetti:** Marilena, you are one of the founders of Inside/Outside Europe, a collaborative research network that since 2013 has been addressing the ‘study of performances of crises and crisis as performance in Europe’ after the 2008 global recession. In these first three years of research, how do you think the European performance scenes have been responding to the challenges and consequences set in motion by what Inside/Outside Europe defines as ‘the systemic crisis of capitalism’?

**Marilena Zaroulia:** The Inside/Outside Europe Research Network was originally set up as a way of channeling our anger for what we, theatre and performance scholars of different European and non-European origins, saw as the march of neoliberalism across the Continent. The network was created and our conversations unfolded in the aftermath of the ‘revolutionary’ year that was 2011 – after the Arab Spring, the *indignados* and Occupy movements – as we gradually realized that a new status quo of austerity, precarity and erosion of fundamental, democratic rights was being established across Europe. Voices of dissent were being silenced while the European Union, now awarded with a Nobel Prize for Peace, stalled by its labyrinthine structures, did not seem to us to promote the interests of Europe’s people. The discourse of ‘crisis’ was employed widely, offering an absurd rationale for further cuts as a way of ‘curing’ the symptoms of the crisis; this discourse of crisis and pathology as Jacques Rancière, among others, has pointed out, perpetuates the logic of the system<sup>61</sup>– hence, we talk about ‘the systemic crisis of capitalism’ that is not unique to our current historical moment.

Against that backdrop, we aimed to consider how performance, both as artistic practice but also in broader terms, can help us understand the times that we live in and the challenges that we face. We were asking: what can we learn from performance about alternative understandings of belonging or identity? About Europe’s shifting borders? Or about the potential of alternative ways of making work or living together? As part of our research, we held workshops at the University of Winchester that funded the Inside/Outside Europe project and that’s how we developed a shared citational field. In other words, although each member of the network embarked on a particular research trajectory, exploring a specific example of theatre, performance, visual arts, activism or everyday life in the three European cities we chose for our project (London, Athens and Berlin), we shared methodologies and texts that influenced our interpretations. One of those texts was Etienne Balibar’s ‘Vanishing Mediator’; in that text, the French philosopher considers the role of the intellectual as a vanishing mediator, a ‘*transitory* institution [...] that creates

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<sup>61</sup> ‘A precarious dialogue’ *Radical Philosophy* (autumn 2013): 20.

the conditions for a new society, [...] by rearranging the elements inherited from the very institution that has to be overcome'.<sup>62</sup>

We wondered whether and how performance makers and performance scholars can operate as such 'vanishing mediators', mobilizing what is already at our disposal in order to overcome it; can we – artists and thinkers – operate as 'borderlines', as mediators of resistance? There are many ways in which we can conceive this function of the artist and the thinker as vanishing mediators but as an example from the contemporary European scene, I will refer to the occupations and activations of abandoned theatres and cultural spaces by collectives of artists. In Greece, for instance, the Mavilli collective reactivated Embros theatre in the centre of Athens in the autumn of 2011 as a way of responding to the absence of cultural policies or government support for new makers.

What was created was a space of sharing work and a platform for collaboration.<sup>63</sup> More recently, in the summer of 2015, another space – Green Park – was activated. Philip Hager and I have recently written about the significance of these initiatives for the changing performance ecology in the context of austerity Athens.<sup>64</sup> What we feel is worthy of note in such examples is the formation of a collective subject that is made up of many individuals, whose friendship and labour produces this shared space and subjectivity. Such ways of working do not seem to aim to a perpetual existence or do not wish to become a new kind of institution, replacing the old ones; in fact, they often fall apart or are replaced. But what remains is a process that is yet to be completed, a willful resistant desire to the neoliberal orthodoxy of productivity.

**AC: Last year, in collaboration with Philip Hager, you co-edited the publication *Performances of Capitalism, Crises and Resistance*. In what way do you see performance (and Live Art if it entered your research) as a means of resistance? What performance artists were mentioned in this regard?**

**MZ:** It is challenging to consider whether and how, *really*, can performance produce a space of resistance. I am always thinking of conversations I have with my students about the limits and potential of performance and the ways in which artists can open up alternative spaces, when they are also caught up in systems and structures of arts funding, networks of festivals, institutions and their mission statements and so on. This is not to

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- Etienne Balibar (2004) 'Europe: Vanishing Mediator?' in *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*. Translated by James Swenson. Princeton: Princeton UP. pp. 203-35. 233.

- See also Gigi Argyropoulou (2012) 'Embros: Twelve thoughts on the rise and fall of performance practice on the periphery of Europe' *Performance Research* 17.6 (On Labour & Performance), 56-62.

- Philip Hager and Marilena Zaroulia (2017) *Libres et déterminées: Performances à Athènes pendant la crise (2010-2015)* Théâtre Public (forthcoming in French).

suggest that performance can never be a means of resistance – but it is to acknowledge that the arts are also implicated in neoliberal processes. However, like I said already, it seems that new ways of being, making and collaborating are emerging; new structures of support are invented, contesting the role of the institution or claiming space for the artists beyond the institutions. It is worth noting the example that opens our book: Giulia Palladini analyses a performance intervention in Berlin initiated by the US collective Red Channels, who in 2009 invited audiences to a collective viewing of the 1930s film *Kuhle Wampe*.<sup>65</sup> Palladini situates this intervention in a post-2008 context, as the ghost of the Weimar Republic was often evoked as warning, further rationalizing austerity policies across Europe. Palladini challenges this orthodoxy, drawing attention to initiatives like the *Red Channels Meets the Red Megaphone* performance as ‘rehearsals for revolution’; in the space produced momentarily by this intervention, what emerged was a different kind of temporality – not one of collapse and fascism but one of a world that is yet to come.

Beyond such practices, we can think of other ways in which performance may challenge the discourse and logic of crisis. *Performances of Capitalism, Crises and Resistance* features examples from different aesthetic registers – from mainstream theatre to Live Art. In her chapter ‘Staging the Others’,<sup>66</sup> Ally Walsh discusses La Pocha Nostra’s 2013 residency in Athens, questioning particularly the performance of the racialized Other in the urban space of a country, stalled by austerity and nationalism. By means of an autoethnographic reflection, Walsh questions how radical performance might misfire in times of crisis.

Or, we can think of cases when contemporary performance invites participation of non-actors and the possibilities that open up in such contexts. Cristina Delgado-García’s chapter on ‘prefigurative politics’<sup>67</sup> explores such issues, focusing on the relation between politics and aesthetics in the work of Salford-based company Quarantine. Delgado argues that the very dramaturgy of a performance like *Entitled* (2011), invites the audience to consider agency and responsibility, ‘*within the present*’, thus challenging dominant temporal structures of capitalism. A similar perspective is put forward in another chapter in the book (‘Performing Politics of Care’); there, Florian Thamer and Tina Turnheim read the theatre as a laboratory where a politics of solidarity is rehearsed.<sup>68</sup>

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- Giulia Palladini (2015) ‘The Weimar Republic and its Return: Unemployment, Revolution, or Europe in a State of *Schuld*’ in *Performances of Capitalism, Crises and Resistance*, ed. by Marilena Zaroulia and Philip Hager. London: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 17-36.

- Aylwyn Walsh (2015) ‘Staging the Others: Appearance, Visibility and Radical Border Crossing in Athens’ in *Performances of Capitalism, Crises and Resistance*, ed. by Marilena Zaroulia and Philip Hager. London: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 134-49.

- Cristina Delgado-García (2015) ‘Making Time: The Prefigurative Politics of Quarantine’s *Entitled*’ in *Performances of Capitalism, Crises and Resistance*, ed. by Marilena Zaroulia and Philip Hager. London: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 94-112.

- Florian Thamer and Tina Turnheim (2015) ‘Performing politics of care: Theatrical practices of radical learning as a Weapon against the Spectre of Fatalism’ in *Performances of*



So, I guess that when we think about the relation between performance and resistance, dramaturgies and ways of working emerge as the two key components for approaching this relation.

**AC:** In your brilliant contribution to the *performingborders* conversation at Central Saint Martins, London, on 30th March, you explored the notion of 'crisis' in relation to the contemporary situation of 'excess'. In April this connection has been further investigated during the '*Crisis*' in *Excess? Performing Europe Today Symposium* at the Winchester University where the very term 'crisis' has been analysed through various academic research and performers' practices. What are in your opinion the findings of this path of research so far?

**MZ:** I have developed a strong interest in this notion of 'excess' as a form of understanding contemporary artistic practices, particularly those that attempt to respond to migration – one of the most urgent realities of our times. Just because we live in times of austerity, it is interesting to consider excess as a form that comments on these times, exposing how empty the term 'crisis' is.

We can think of excess as waste and question who or what constitutes the waste of contemporary world; there are plenty of evocative images of migrants crossing land and sea borders, where bodies en masse exceed what Europe, purportedly, can accommodate. It is equally interesting to look at objects that we associate with the migrants' crossings as performances of excess. For instance, the boats that migrants used, which in visual arts are reframed as stands-in for their plight, or the piles of life vests that are abandoned in the shores of Greek islands that are used as primary material for installations like Ai Weiwei's *Safe Passage* during the 2016 Berlin Film Festival.

For that intervention, Ai Weiwei covered Berlin's Konzerthaus with the thousands of life vests that he had collected in Lesbos while he asked celebrities attending the gala inside the building to wear emergency blankets, which we have all seen covering migrant bodies when found at sea. The result was both visually arresting and absurd; a pure performance of excess. Or, you can think about the work of German collective, Centre for Political Beauty, particularly a piece called *The Dead are Coming* which purportedly involved the transport of dead migrant bodies from South Europe to Berlin, the symbolic centre of Fortress Europe. Such examples of artistic practice raise complex ethical questions about the role of the artist as an agent of excess, when they are faced with urgent questions

that often exceed the limits of our comprehension or sensibility and demand empathy.

**AC: What are in your opinion at the moment the most interesting performers, or artists, whose work is tackling notion of crisis, resistance, migration, Europe and contemporary capitalism?**

**MZ:** This is such a difficult question to answer, because of the plurality and diversity of the European arts scenes as well as the porosity of European borders. Who counts as European or even, does this question matter anymore? In my work, I really try to move past the Eurocentric arguments about the unique artistic traditions of Europe and recognize how Europe's colonial past has contributed to our contemporary understanding of European identities and cultures.

Just because I live in London and I am currently working a lot on performance and migration, I will use as a brief example *On the Move*, the day-long festival that LIFT organized at the Royal Court theatre in June. That day featured various performances, installations, audio walks and theatre, which all together produced a kaleidoscopic and rather affective insight into how borders are crossed and how we, artists and audiences, may or may not be able to understand such experiences through performance. Chris Thorpe performed *The Milk of Human Kindness*, a six-hour marathon that involved him reading readers' comments on articles about migration published mainly in two British newspapers, *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun*. The durational form of the performance and the endurance of the performer reading out that ludicrous material produced a rather unsettling yet poignant commentary on how public opinion is produced and how visions of Otherness are produced in contemporary Britain. Immediately after Thorpe's piece, I experienced *as far as my fingertips take me*, a ten-minute, one-to-one performance installation by Tania El Khoury in collaboration with Basel Zaraq. The performance involved me listening to a song, while the man who I could not see because he was sitting on the other side of the wall was drawing on my arm that I had put through a hole. The piece triggered a number of thoughts about responsibility, affect and how performance can sincerely confront all that exceeds us. That confrontation may constitute a moment of resistance but the question remains: what do we do when the performance is over?

**AC: I am writing these questions after the results of the UK European Union membership referendum in which a majority of the voters supported Leave. On 18th June Inside/Outside Europe Research Network was one of the partners of *Being European: Before the Referendum*, a one-day programme of talks and performances about Europeanness, belonging, and democracy. As part of the promotional material of this event there was an announcement of a second event**

**in September/October 2016 about being European after the referendum. In light of the UK planned exit from the EU, would you mind to tell us a bit more about the first event's outcomes and what you are planning to do for the second one? Have the destabilising results of the referendum already impacted on performers' practices and the network of research of Inside/Outside Europe?**

**MZ:** Indeed; how interesting and terrifying times to think about the future of Europe and the performing arts in the Continent. This is not only because of Brexit and the immense, economic, socio-political and cultural consequences that the British vote has already had and will continue to have in Britain and across Europe. More broadly, we can see that Europe is at a crossroads; the numerous terrorist attacks, the rise of demagogic and fascist politics, the demonization of migrants and refugees, the EU's inability to respond meaningfully to all these challenges as well as the persistence of austerity policies make up a picture of distress, if not decay. Of course, if we don't wish to perceive the world from a Eurocentric point of view, we can all agree that European international politics and multiple military interventions outside the borders of Europe have contributed to a new age of fear.

The *Before the Referendum* event was developed in partnership with Camden People's Theatre, the European Theatre Research Network at the University of Kent and the Centre of Contemporary Theatre at Birkbeck College, University of London. The aim of the event was to produce a space of reflection and interrogation, to fight the toxic and divisive argument that had dominated the debate; to use the theatre as a space of togetherness. Apart from the five performances that offered different perspectives on the question of Europe, panels of artists and academics came together to offer different perspectives on what Europe means, on how performance can momentarily open up a space for understanding identity and difference in the continent. It was also very useful to hear from experts on European law and politics, who offered sound arguments about the role of the EU, who challenged the over-simplified argument about Britain's loss of sovereignty because of its EU membership. I will never forget Nadine El Enany's inspiring intervention, as she argued that what was really exposed during the referendum campaign was British post-imperial melancholy and the persistence of racist and colonial attitudes; what was at stake was not Britain's membership in the EU but Britain's, or rather England's self-identification.

On Saturday September 17<sup>th</sup>, we return to CPT, organizing the second part of *Being European: After the Referendum*. We have commissioned four new performances that will tackle the question 'What does Europe mean for you today?' in different forms. We are also putting together a panel of speakers who will consider the future of culture after Brexit. We are considering a few ways that the audience can interact further with the

event during the breaks between shows. The point of the event, at least for me, is to gather as artists, audiences, citizens, British, Europeans, non-Europeans and move past the (understandable) trauma and paralysis that the referendum caused to lot of people. Again, we are looking to the theatre as a space where possibilities might open up.

**AC: Tell us a bit more about your own future projects and the future of Inside/Outside Europe Research Network.**

**MZ:** During the next two years, I will be finally writing a book that I have been thinking about for a few years. Its title is *Encountering Europe on British Stages: Performances, Policies and Affects since 1990* and its aim is to consider the ways in which British theatre and performance have engaged with ideas of Europe and European identities from the end of the Cold War until the present. My starting point is that performance is a space of encounter and the book will chart and theorize how in performance, Britain and Europe have interacted through different modes of encounter. The book will also discuss the ways in which European cultural policies have affected and shaped the British theatre landscape over the past quarter-century, contesting British isolation and island mentality. Obviously, I will be writing the book as the negotiations on the terms of Brexit will be unfolding but my hope is that this book will not be only a product of its time but that it will offer a much broader perspective on the Britain/Europe conundrum.

As for the network, we are a group of friends as well as collaborators – our conversations are ongoing and the issues that we care about are still pressing; although we don't have specific plans for the future after the After the Referendum Festival, I am sure that the network as a space of dialogue and collaboration will carry on.

**Marilena Zaroulia** is a Senior Lecturer in Drama and Theatre at the Department of Performing Arts, University of Winchester. Her research focuses on theatre, performance and the cultural politics of post-1989 Europe. She has published on contemporary British theatre, performance, affect and national identity, utopian performatives and the Eurovision Song Contest, and performance and migration. She co-convenes the Inside/Outside Europe Research Network and is the co-editor of *Performances of Capitalism, Crises and Resistance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). She currently serves as the Secretary of Theatre and Performance Research Association (TaPRA). *Encountering Europe on British Stages: Performances, Policies and Affects since 1990* will be published by Methuen Drama Engage.

**To know more about Marilena Zaroulia's work:**

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

Additional resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
Pbl	'Performances of capitalism, Crises and Resistance', 2015	Marilena Zaroulia and Philip Hager	<a href="http://www.palgrave.com/us/book/9781137379368">http://www.palgrave.com/us/book/9781137379368</a>
DIC	'Crisis' in Excess: Performing Europe Today' - Winchester University, 2016	Organised by Inside/Outside Europe Research Network	<a href="http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2016/04/crisis-in-excess-performing-europe-today/">http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2016/04/crisis-in-excess-performing-europe-today/</a>
DIC	'performingborders. art crossings   Europe' Central Saint Martins, 2016	Organised by Alessandra Cianetti	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrTyi1Dwl-Y&amp;feature=youtu.be">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrTyi1Dwl-Y&amp;feature=youtu.be</a>

**Alessandra Cianetti:** Sara, from 21st March 2017 you will be embarking on Ah-Be (in the direction of a rose) – Blue (dar maseereh yek goleh roz): a 573-day walking journey starting from the source of the River Thames along the waterways of Europe and the Caucasus to Tehran, planning to arrive to your destination on 15th October 2018. Water, sources, the colour blue, a rose, true love are the symbols of your performance. Please, tell us a bit more about how the idea of this piece was born and how you envision for it to work. How do you think Ah-Be fits within your practice as a live artist?

**Sara Zaltash:** Ah-Be has several beginnings, which are disputed even in my mind – like any river, its sources are multiple, and each one is true. I'll tell you the story I tell most people, which begins in October 2014, a drama that unfolded when I was visiting my maternal grandmother in Tehran. She was gently giving me a hard time for still being single. I'm the second eldest of her twelve grandchildren, after my sister who is the eldest. Me, my sister and my younger brother grew up in England, the Western world. We have much wilder expectations than my grandmother about our love lives, who married my grandfather when she was fourteen years old and had almost all of her six children by the time she was my age. (Though, isn't that pretty wild in comparison to my university romances and online dating disasters? Different jungle, I guess.) My grandmother was saying that I was close to "souring", the Farsi equivalent of being "left on the shelf". My sister, six years my elder, was already way passed her sell by date, and my Nanna wanted a wedding before she got too old to enjoy it. So I promised her that the next time I saw her I would bring "that special someone" to meet her.

When I was small, my Nanna taught me the Farsi word for "promise" – ghol. It sounds a bit like "ball" in English. Playing along, she taught me by rolling an imaginary ball across the rug while we promised silly things to each other – I promising to eat a hundred cream cakes, she promising to cook my favourite shami kebabs. So, maybe twenty-two years later, when I effectively promised to bring her my future husband (never mind that I'm bi, already divorced, have a waning belief in the institution of marriage, and have for several years been more interested in long-term polyamory than a lifetime of monogamy [even if that interest has been more academic than pragmatic]) she looked at me with her chin slightly raised, an expression which utterly characterises her soul in its expectation of defiance, and asked me, "Really? You promise?" To which I immediately replied, "Yes, of course, I mean it, I promise." I may have even put my hand on my heart. The cab I had been waiting for buzzed her third-floor apartment, cutting into our moment like a spinning saw through steel rope. Afterwards, oozing around Tehran's ill-judged internal autobahn network in the early afternoon heat, I realised what I had done. I had promised my Nanna, my

only remaining grandparent, that the next time I saw her I would defy the conventional romantic mundanities of Western millennial cosmopolitanism and definitely, absolutely, soul-bindingly turn up with a husband. Oh dear.

Later that afternoon, my two aunts of my father's side were giving me a hard time for working while I was in Tehran. My father and I were staying with them uptown, in a new suburb at the foothills of the Darband peak of the Alborz mountain range, where they each had matching apartments next door to each other. My presence in Iran had been gifted to me by my father, who had invited me on one of his short trips to see family. With a characteristic workaholism that buttresses my passion for lived experience, I was using the opportunity to undertake self-directed field research about contemporary Iranian female tapestry weavers relating to my annual durational performance trilogy, Tuul. While my also-workaholic father didn't mind so much that I was using studio visits and interviews and photography sessions to escape from oppressive family engagements, his sisters absolutely did. One of my aunts was baffled by my commitment to my work, that I didn't recognise how meaningless it would become once I inevitably married and had a brood of human children to feed and groom, and how I should honour my dad's funding of the holiday by hanging out with the grown-ups while they smoked cigarettes and talked about the good old days before the Islamic Revolution. Intersectional oppression analysts, eat your heart out! Under the pressure of that moment, and in a snap of defiance – I am my Nanna's grandchild, after all – I announced resolutely that, "the next time I come to Iran, I am coming here on my own gig! I don't care if I have to walk every step of the way."

So, a story began. In one day, I made two promises to my ancestors. One to deliver the future, and another to release myself from the past. I would walk to Iran, and bring my one true love to my grandmother. Another part of the story began in October 2015 when I met a hydraulics expert, a fellow Fellow of the Schumacher Institute, who was doing some consultancy on a UN project in Iran called Hydrocity, which is addressing the water crisis in the region by reopening a series of ancient underground aqueducts called qanaats. I got his attention by inventing the broadcast element of the performance-to-be on the spot during a coffee break at a Fellows meeting. Another part of the story begins at around 3am on 7th September 2013, the last day of my 100-day performance Sink or Sing, two days after I had swam to Bestival while singing. My dear friend Ellie Stamp and I had returned to my grubby tent, starving after hours of dancing, hunting for sundries in my mess of tech and costumery. She asked me what I was going to do next now that the swim was done, and I, drunkenly, through a mouthful of baked beans that I was spooning straight from the can into my mouth, apparently said was going to walk to Iran, singing the whole way. I say "apparently", because I had no memory of this declaration. Ellie reminded me of it when I excitedly told her earlier this

year about the plans for “my new walking project”. She looked at me in her quizzical, generous, loving way and said, “Yes, I know about that, you told me ages ago.” It seems I had told her before I’d even told myself, or my grandmother, or my aunts, or you.

More of these true story sources spring up every day that I live through the preparations for the walk. Ah-Be, as with all my work as a live artist, is my life unfolding, a life lived in service, a story being told using strategies I have gathered from experiences in theatre, performance, music, philosophy, politics, law, literature, poetry, the Internet, the land and spiritual practice. In service of what? The answer to that question expands and contracts around an idea I call the Oneness – an idea of love, truth, community, belonging, revelation, creation. I envisage that Ah-Be will tell stories of the Oneness, via the medium of live art, through the channel of my life, for the goodness of you all.

**AC: With Ah-Be you are going to cross several national borders in an attempt to go back to Iran, in a journey that you define as a ‘hopeful alternative narrative to the stereotypical portrayal of the migrant’s tale’ and today we could add also to the stereotypical portrayal of the so called ‘refugees crisis’. How do you think your message of ‘true love’ that you are bringing back to your grand-mother and also inviting people to join your journey, can revert that narrative?**

**SZ:** Your question guides me implicitly to answer thus: we see the flight from the East to West as a flight of fear, of escape from bad to good; therefore the return from West to the East can only be a return of love, with love, for love. An invitation to participate in the love that flows against the fire of fear is powerful because it offers to soothe those burning pains; even animals heartless enough to lack sympathy for refugees feel the burning pain of fear, so the journey’s enactment and attendant invitation to participate soothes all. However, your question also implies, “what else but love would propel the agency of one fortunate enough to live in the West to will a return to that darkening Eastern horizon?” I asked myself that question as well. By positioning love – and one true love, at that! – as the hook for every other sociopolitical context, by placing my romantic life at the centre of my practice as if it were a sculptural object to be moulded, I’m making overt a consistent, though often hidden, theme in my artworks and harnessing the power of a tale as old as time. Girls seeks boy for eternal devotion, please apply within. But there is something about that implication – not yours specifically, but the one that I infer from the wider discursive context – which grates on me. The implied heroism of my journey reinforces the supremacy of the West over the East, a cultivated supremacy which was unleashed by European colonial impulses, and which arguably got us all into this mess.



Walking of my own free will, as a women, West to East, privileged with multiple citizenship, alone except for the companions that choose to join me, fearless, bearing only love and the hope of love, and placing my actions on a universally accessible stage for all to witness, I manifestly oppose the motifs of the refugee crisis, of the masses of men and families walking with fear through the shadowy valleys of crisis. In every migrant's heart is a question of when they can return home. In spirit, I am their daughter, their granddaughter, answering that question. I relieve them of the indignity caused by the oppressor who insists on supremacy over them; yes, fathers, yes mothers, I am going home, fuck all these supremacists, I am going back to our own land.

Though, of course, it's infinitely more complicated than that. See the Oneness for details.

**AC: The performance will be broadcasted through a 24/7 audio signal that will follow what you defined as your 'pilgrimage'. Words and music play a big part in your practice, how are you thinking of using them in the project? How will you negotiate between your intimacy as a walking traveller and the continuous public exposure of the soundscape of your performance?**

**SZ:** Sound, song, music and musicality are the invisible infrastructure of my life, and therefore my work, always evolving and growing, cradling me, transposing my affections and curtailments onto my voice and rhythm, signposting, commemorating and monumentalising, sometimes creating communities around me, sometimes crowds before me, sometimes my only friend. Except for when I am writing, I rarely pass a waking hour without music, I hear sound in my dreams. If you squint with your third eye, you can feel that everything is a song being sung. There are a thousand ways that the project will sing, through Spotify playlists, through the choir that will sing at the opening ceremony on the first dawn of the walk, through my own practice of singing the Islamic call-to-prayer every day, through the anthem that I will write while walking, through the performances I give along the way, through the people that join me and teach me their songs, through the sounds of the rivers, the birds, the trees, the humans, all singing their own lives away.

Intimacy and exposure are facets of privacy and publicity that feel emotionally relevant to me as an individual at the beginning of the 21st century, though only because of the stories about private and public life that we've been told. These stories are told across the battle for the collapsing frontier of privacy in digital space. They are told by the prejudice meted out to those whose lives manifest the changing norms of human sexual practices. They are told by the shame used to disempower agency of all magnitudes. They are told by the exploitation of living beings that is fuelled by the entrenched Enlightenment scientific fiction of the

unitary human consciousness that lives inside the biological human brain. Being only human, we internalise these stories so that we can live our lives. Perhaps because I have lived between stories – between England, Iran, Catholicism, Islam, Europe, America – I've noticed that these stories were once told with different characters and plot lines. For example, just a few years ago, I might have taken it for granted that an omniscient divine presence witnessed all my deeds, that I shared my consciousness with every rank of being from star to starfish, that my flowing sexual energy would flourish shamelessly through communal ritual, that alter fires must burn to mark the passage of each bloody sacrifice. All sorts of stories.

As an author of my story of pilgrimage, I have the opportunity to reposition intimacy and exposure, and their counterparts, shame and celebration, to promote a simple parable about love and trust: if I can trust that I will be loved whatever I do, then all my life can be shared, and I need hide nothing. If I can trust that I will be loved whatever I do, then the boundary between private and public life can begin to shimmer with an effervescent fluidity, providing intimacy, providing celebration, resisting shame, resisting exposure. During over thirteen thousand hours of sound, I plan to negotiate my territory by positioning my audience as divine witness, connected umbilically to and by my most intimate invisible infrastructure. Walking in service of the Oneness, I have nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to expose. So what if they hear me pooing? So what if they hear me falling in love? So what if they hear me sleeping, crying, talking? Does the Oneness not already hold me to account? The listener then has a moral choice to make about whether they feel shame at our intimacy, or celebrate it, whether they love me and honour the trust I place in them, or do something else, which dishonours us both, and thereby dishonours the Oneness of which they are inherently a part.

It's a rather manipulative performer-audience contract. See the Oneness for details.

**AC: Ah-Be (in the direction of a rose) – Blue (dar maseereh yek goleh roz) is an ambitious and intriguing project whose realisation seems to have been involving many people among team and supporters. Would you mind telling us a bit more about them and their role in the creation of the piece?**

**SZ:** Oh, there are so many people helping! An ever-growing list of humans, agencies, organisations, institutions – of course there are. I am dedicating a significant chunk of my life to crossing a continent and a half on foot while doing a live broadcast that has no technological precedent. How could it be any other way? Perhaps, if it were a solo pilgrimage in an old spiritual paradigm without the audio aspect, if I were a sadhu or a wandering druid, then maybe I could be working alone, although even then I'd be collaborating with the divine Presence, Awen, the Oneness or

whoever you want to credit for everything that moves beyond my will. The project actually began forming when the first funding support was offered by someone who is heavily invested in the story of the Iran, so it's never really been just me. The project team has several producers, specialists, support organisations, patrons, sponsors and mentors. At the moment, I am Executive Producer and Lead Artist, so I hold the reigns and make all the big decisions. I'm looking forward to handing the Exec Producer reigns over to a bigger organisation soon, so that I can focus on harnessing my soul for the fun stuff, though at this stage there is no distinction between producing the project and creating the artwork, each decision is a creative decision. Over a decade of working in creative teams – first in theatre, then in the music industry, then in a band, then as an emerging performance artist in collectives, and now as a somewhat emerged and working full-time solo artist – I've learned that the best way to make good decisions is to listen to the people who know what they are doing, and that eventually someone has to have the final say.

That's my method, it works for me. All my freelancers get a huge amount of creative scope, I work with them because I like their style, ideas and attitude rather than because they can do my bidding. Managing a team is one of my favourite parts of any project. My father's family were all military and my mother's family are enormous; somewhere between those heritages, I feel very comfortable marshalling a familial battalion of creative warriors, occasionally summoning in elders when I don't know what I'm doing, or need a resource injection. After the walk, I'd like to have a standing team around my practice that has a more radical approach to hierarchy and workflow. Sara Zaltash Cooperative Productions – now that's ambitious.

**AC:** In the programme 'Walking Women', a series of UK-based events that places women at the centre of discussions and debates about walking and art, the promotional material started with the following quote: 'The invisibility of women in what appears as a canon of walking is conspicuous; where they are included, it is often as an 'exception' to an unstated norm, represented by a single chapter in a book or even a footnote'.<sup>69</sup> What led you to choose walking as a medium? I wonder also whether you have any source of inspiration among other performers, I'm here thinking for example at 'Brides on Tour' by Italian artist Pippa Bacca we briefly discussed when we met.

**SZ:** This is the moment that I admit: I know very little about the canon of walking art. One of the project's producers has lent me a book about Hamish Fulton; I recently participated in a workshop at the University of Sussex led by Karen Christopher, Augusto Corrieri and Sara Jane Bailes

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- Heddon and Turner (2012) 'Walking Women: Shifting the Tales and Scales of Mobility' Contemporary Theatre Review, Vol. 22(2), 2012, p. 225. More info on Walking Women at <http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/whats-on/walking-women/>

about performance composition in relation to landscape; I have joined the Walking Artists Network. I have lived on permaculture projects and with radical land activists, and presently reside in rural Gloucestershire. I tend to cycle to get around the place, although I do go for more walks these days. That's about it. Initially, I was keen to preserve my naivety around walking art, and give my audience the experience of witnessing my growth through the discipline. By analogy, I have never trained as a dancer, and yet when I dance with those who have trained, they envy me for my freedom of movement. Same with music – I have hardly any formal music training, so I can hear things intuitively that technique blocks out. Having preserved that naivety while Ah-Be was beginning, I can now hold space for the ideas that will serve the project. As my genesis story proffers, I didn't even really choose walking as my medium, I'm just following a turn of phrase through to practical manifestation in in service of an idea. Apart from my ontological and epistemological allegiance to Performance in general, I am opposed to being medium specific.

We talked about Pippa Bacca because her brutal death at the hands of bad men kept being thrown at me as a reason why my walk was too dangerous to enact. I was noting to you that women I was consulting with were eager to help in whatever way they could, while men felt that they needed to give me permission, or to protect me. The male response – and this is from even the most enlightened males – was often “You can't do that, it's not safe, who's coming with you?”, whereas women would say, “that's impressive, how can I help? what do you need?” Men know men, I guess, and patriarchy runs deep. Pippa's story inspired me to embed security into the creative strategies of the walk, to trust in the reality of the world, rather than my ideals for it. Instead of leaning on patriarchy and capitalism by hiring an ex-SAS man and loading my gear onto a support vehicle, I've begun calling out to organisations along the route that support people who are vulnerable to dangerous prejudice – artists, women, men, trans, queer, all the colours, all the abilities, all the creatures – to join me walking through dangerous zones, so that our collectivity keeps us safe. There is also the universal call-out for people to join me walking, so even if you feel invulnerable in the face of prejudice, and just fancy walking with me, you can, and you'll be helping me be safe. Unless you're a bad man, or a bad woman, or a bad creature. In which case, stay away. Or tune in via the live stream!

My only notable walking inspiration comes from a pilgrim depicted in Werner Herzog's *Wheel of Time* (2003), a documentary about the Kalachakra initiations of 2002. This pilgrim, a monk, performs full body prostrations over three thousand miles for more than three and a half years in order to reach the Bodhi Tree of the Buddha's enlightenment. Bones on his hands have grown nodes, he has a scar on his forehead from touching the ground a couple of million times. He says that he knows how big the earth is, because he has measured the distance with his entire body, from

head to toe. I watched that film in early 2015, prep for some R&D work with a director in Birmingham, thinking about the distance between my life as a performance artist in the UK and the lives of my ancestors in Iran. About the distance between my cultural reality and that of the lovers I had known. And I thought, walking to Iran will be an excellent way for us learn that distance together, my one true love and I, whoever they might be or become.

**AC:** In our conversation you mentioned that all this year has been completely dedicated to building Ah-Be (in the direction of a rose) – Blue (dar maseereh yek goleh roz) and you have already organised a launch party, workshops and events in Bristol in July. What was the response of your audience and what are your plans for the rest of 2016?

**SZ:** The audience response to the project is almost universal wonder, support and encouragement. It blows people's minds in a way that I have never encountered before, showing me that I am doing something exceptionally good, which after years of art practice is a cherished relief. If I let myself become audience to the idea, rather than steward, it starts to blow my mind too, becomes overwhelming, so for the most part I sit next to the idea and let it show me the way. That way seems to invite encounter, conversation, to share the Oneness, to be bold and pure and honest and principled. It's hard, though when I see that even the idea of the project – a woman walking to Iran to deliver her one true love to her grandmother and broadcasting the sound of the journey – can change peoples' perception of human capability, or love and courage and hope, I remember what I am doing all of this for. And discipline, after all, is remembering what you want.

In between planning the project, I will spend as much time loving my friends and family as possible. I have already seen some of them for the last time before the walk begins, it's heartbreaking, I love my kin, and things will never be the same after the walk. As for those project plans, I am about to go on a research trip to Tehran, Tbilisi and Budapest to lay tracks and make friends in advance of the arriving their on foot, there are more public exhibitions in Bristol and London, a website that needs to be launched, a crowdfunder to be rolled out, sponsorship to firm up, tech to procure, a practice walk or two, press stuff. Plans for the launch ceremony at dawn on 21st March 2017 at the source of the River Thames in Kemble include busloads of friends from Bristol and London, gorse wreaths, a choir, someone shaving my head, blessings from notable spiritual leaders, the works. Everyone must come.

**Sara Zaltash** is a British-Iranian live performance artist enacting her evolving engagement with political, philosophical and spiritual realities through boldly populist shows, projects and acts. Time, scale, song,

*poetics and the divine preoccupy her as she draws on her experiences in contemporary performance, theatre and dance, singing and music, spiritual practice, legal, philosophical and academic enquiry, and Persian literature and culture to craft disarming encounters for stages, sites, moments and legends. Sara has performed extensively in the UK and Europe. “Zaltash is electrifying... See her if you can.” – Adrian Searle, The Guardian, 2015*

**To know more about Sara Zaltash’s work:**

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

Additional resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
DIA	<i>Ah-Be (in the direction of a rose)</i> website	Sarah Zaltash	<a href="https://sarazaltash.com/acts/ah-be-in-the-direction-of-a-rose/">https://sarazaltash.com/acts/ah-be-in-the-direction-of-a-rose/</a>

## LADA STUDY ROOM RESOURCES SUMMARIES

### #border | A selected list of Study Room resources on Live Art and borders

Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview

Type	Title	Author	Reference
Pbl	Gardens Speak, 2016	Tania El Khoury	P2938
Pbl	Portable Borders, 2015	Ila Nicole Sheren	P2839
Pbl	Chapter contribution 'Developing Dialogues: Live Art and Femininity in Post-Conflict Ireland' in <i>Performance Art in Ireland: A History</i> , edited by Dr. Áine Phillips, 2015	Helena Walsh	P2642
Pbl	Moving Image, 2015	Omar Kholeif	P2886
Pbl	Study Room Guide / LADA Anthology: Dangerous Border Crossings (with thanks to Guillermo Gómez-Peña), 2014	LADA	P2367
Pbl	Study Room Guide / LADA Anthology: I Wasn't There, 2014	Aaron Wright	P2613
Pbl	Stories of Refuge: Oral Histories of Syrian Asylum Seekers in Germany, 2014	Tania El Khoury	P2661
Pbl	Tempting Failure Study Boxes Study Room Guide, 2014	Aaron Wright and Lois Keidan	P2612
Pbl	A Study Room Guide to Remoteness, 2014	Tracey Warr	P2600
Pbl	Live Collision Study Boxes Study Room Guide, 2014	LADA	P2398
Pbl	Dreams for an Institution: a Study Room Guide, 2014	Johanna Linsley	P2313

Pbl	Study Room Guide: On Falling, 2013	Amy Sharrocks	P2249
Pbl	IBT Study Boxes Study Room Guide, 2013	Lois Keidan and Aaron Wright	P2104
Pbl	Study Room Guide / LADA Anthology: Girls on Film, 2013	Aaron Wright	P2451
Pbl	Bodily Functions In Performance Study Room Guide, 2013	Lois Keidan	P2195
Pbl	Natasha Davis: Performance Film Installation, 2013	Natasha Davis	P2119
Pbl	Nothing To Declare, 2013	Dictaphone Group	P2662
Pbl	The Live Art Almanac: Volume 3, 2013	Lois Keidan, Aaron Wright	P2250
Pbl	Which is the: 49 Views, 2012	Nick Stewart	P2212
Pbl	SPILL Study Boxes Study Room Guide, 2012	Aaron Wright and Lois Keidan	P2012
Pbl	Study Room Guide: Making Routes, Journeys in Live Art, 2012	David Overend	P1964
Pbl	Explosion! Painting as Action, 2012	Various	P2143
Pbl	Study Room Guide: Take the Money and Run? Some Positions on Ethics, Business Sponsorship and Making, 2012	Jane Trowell, Platform	P1820
Pbl	Enrique Jezik Lines of Division, 2011	Kate Bonansinga	P2648
Pbl	Notes From Away (Diario de a Bordo), 2011	Marie Ange Bordas	P1794



Pbl	Brutal Silences: A Live Art Development Agency Study Room Guide on Live Art in Ireland, 2011	Ann Maria Healy, Helena Walsh	P1661
Pbl	Conversations Across Borders: A Performance Artist Converses Theorists, Curators, Activists and Fell, 2011	Guillermo Gómez-Peña	P1802
Pbl	Admixture: Human Migration and Genetic Inheritance, 2011	Joshua Sofaer, C. Tyler-Smith, D. Eagleman	P1761
Pbl	Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance, 2011	Chris Salter	P1438
Pbl	Counter Point Multidisciplinary Art Event, 2011		P1799
Pbl	Enacting Others: Politics of Identity, 2011	Cherise Smith	P2395
Pbl	Exercises for Rebel Artists, 2011	Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Roberto Sifuentes	P1944
Pbl	A Pathognomy of Performance, 2011	Simon Bayly	P1946
Pbl	How to Become a Member of Team GB, 2010	Heath Bunting	P1477
Pbl	A Study Room Guide: Disability and New Artistic Models, 2010	Aaron Williamson	P1529
Pbl	Tania Bruguera, 2010	Lucrezia Cippitelli and Domenico Scudero	P2483
Pbl	Tania Bruguera: on the political imaginary, 2010	Carrie Lambert-Beatty, Gerardo Mosquera, Helaine Posner	P2543

Pbl	(W)reading Performance Writing: A Study Room Guide (2010) by Rachel Lois Clapham, 2010	Rachel Lois Clapham	P1433
Pbl	A Story of Deception, 2010	Francis Alys	P1476
Pbl	Lament, 2009	Richard Ashrowan	P2492
Pbl	Transeuropéennes: Theater and the Public Space, 2009	Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes	P2619
Pbl	French and Mottershead's Study Room Guide - Making It Your Own? – Social Engagement and Participation, 2009	French and Mottershead	P1290
Pbl	Study Room Guide: One to One Performance, 2009	Rachel Zerihan	P1320
Pbl	Marco Pustianaz's Study Room Guide - In Search of a Documentology. Walking (Half) the Study Room, 2008	Marco Pustianaz	P1115
Pbl	Adele Tan's Study Room Guide - A Small Map Piece of Performance Art in China, 2008	Adele Tan	P1114
Pbl	Plateaux 2008 - new Positions in International Performing Arts, 2008	Various	P1149
Pbl	Robert Pacitti's Study Room Guide - the More You Ignore Me the Closer I Get, 2008	Robert Pacitti	P1100
Pbl	sk-interfaces:Exploring Borders - Creating Membranes in Art, Technology and Society, 2008	Jens Hauser	P1022
Pbl	Book of the Disappeared, 2008	Carnesky Productions	P1315
Pbl	365 Performances, 2007	Jamie McMurry	P1023

Pbl	Francis Alys, 2007	Francis Alys	P0911
Pbl	Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Become Political and Sometimes Doing Something Political Can Be, 2007	Francis Alys	P1475
Pbl	Study Room Guide - In the Footnotes of Library Angels: A Bi(bli)ography of Insurrectionary Imaginati, 2006	John Jordan	P0793
Pbl	Lone Twin's Study Room Guide, 2006	Lone Twin	P1025
Pbl	Strangers with Angelic Faces, 2006		P1692
Pbl	Loneliness in the Boundaries, 2006	Melati Suryodarmo	P1297
Pbl	Displacements – Deslocamentos, 2005	Marie Ange Bordas	P1979
Pbl	Franko B's Study Room Guide, 2004	Franko B	P0602
Pbl	Trans-global readings: Crossing theatrical boundaries, 2004	Caridad Svich	P2468
Pbl	You Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination, 2003	Katharine Harmon	P2506
Pbl	The Paris Jigsaw – Internationalism and the city's stages, 2002	David Bradby and Maria M. Delgado	P1270
Pbl	Beyond Boundaries: the arts after the events of 2001, 2002	Peter Hewitt	P1723
Pbl	Globalisation and its Discontents, 2002	Joseph E. Stiglitz	P1263
Pbl	Displacement & Difference, 2001	Fran Lloyd	P1296

Pbl	Codex Espangliensis: From Columbus to the Border Patrol, 2000	Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Enrique Chagoya, Felicia Rice	P0283
Pbl	Dangerous Border Crossers, 2000	Guillermo Gómez-Peña	P0117
Pbl	The Cultural Studies Reader, 2000	Simon During	P1269
Pbl	Body Probe - Mutating Physical Boundaries, 1999	David Wood	P0491
Pbl	Media & Performance along the border, 1998	Johannes Birringer	P1310
Pbl	Temple of Confessions – Mexican Beasts and Living Santos, 1997	Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes	P1033
Pbl	The New World Border – Prophecies, Poems & Loqueras for the End of the Century, 1997	Guillermo Gómez-Peña	P1989
Pbl	The Living Theatre - Art, Exile and Outrage, 1997	John Tytell	P1268
Pbl	English is Broken Here – Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas, 1995	Coco Fusco	P2024
Pbl	The New World Border, 1994	Guillermo Gómez-Peña	P1989
Pbl	Disrupted Borders – An Intervention in Definitions of Boundaries, 1993	Sunil Gupta	P2015
Pbl	Warrior for Gringostroika, 1993	Guillermo Gómez-Peña	P0442
Art	The Contested Scenography of Revolution, 2013	Tania El Khoury	A0578
Art	Walks of Life, 2010	Francis Alys	A0346
Art	Theatre Without Boundaries, 2004	Lyn Gardner, Quarantine	A0404

DVD & Pbl	Between the Borders, 2014	Between the Borders	P2728
DVD	Knitting Iron - Poshya Kakil Selected Works, 2012	Poshya Kakil	D1846
DVD	Trashing Performance, Common, in Conversation, 2011	Tavia Nyong'o and Tania Bruguera	D2104
DVD	Paves, 2010	Poshya Kaki, Anne Bean, Vlasta Delimar, Efi Ben-David, Sinead O'Donnell	D1447
DVD	Suspended, 2010	Natasha Davis	D1538
DVD	Suspended, 2010	Natasha Davis	D1842
DVD	Rupture, 2010	Natasha Davis	D1250
DVD	Exhibitions & Works, 2009	Poshya Kakil	D1233
DVD	Game Project and Border Project, 2008		D1248
DVD	NRLA (National Review of Live Art) 2008 - You Are Here...But Where Am I? - Performing Rights Glasgow, 2008	Stacy Makishi	D1096
DVD	Anti-Cool, 2008	Anti-Cool	D1178
DVD	Festival Scavengers, 2008	Joshua Sofaer	D1170
DVD	Fame Asylum, 2006	Richard DeDomenici	D0838
DVD	Performing Rights Collection - London - Fame Asylum, 2006	Richard DeDomenici/Status	D0551
DVD	Rights on the Line: Vigilantes at the Border, 2005	Witness	D0337

DVD	Borderstasis - a Video Diary, 1998	Guillermo Gómez-Peña	D0760
DVD	Temple of Confessions – Mexican Beasts and Living Santos, 1997	Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes	D1966
DVD	Border Brijo, 1990	Guillermo Gómez-Peña	D0759
DVD	Video Excerpts – DVD #2	Roberto Sifuentes	D1959
DVD	Cargo Sofia-X	Rimini Protokoll	D0887
DF	Weathering the Storm: Guillermo Gómez-Peña Keynote Film, 2015	Guillermo Gomez Pena	EF5175
DF	Gardens Speak, 2014	Tania El Khoury	EF5153
DF	Long Table on Feminism Documentation, 2013	LADA	EF5082
DF	On Falling Powerpoint Presentation and Playlist, 2013	Amy Sharrocks	P2248
DF	Jarideh, 2013	Tania El Khoury	EF5154
DF	Nothing To Declare, 2013	Dictaphone Group	EF5156
DF	Maybe if you choreograph me you will feel better, 2011	Tania El Khoury	EF5155
DF	Fame Asylum	Richard DeDomenici	DB0062
DF	You Are Here... But Where Am I?, 2012	Stacy Makishi	DB0045

## #europe | A selected list of Study Room resources on Live Art and Europe

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

Type	Title	Author	Reference
Pbl	Contemporary European Theatre Directors, 2010	Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato	P2908
Pbl	Edge of Europe: Project in the areas of performance and writing, 2010	Various	P1560
Pbl	Performative Gestures Political Moves, 2010	Katja Kobolt and Lana Zdravković	P2607
Pbl	The Clandestine Histories of the OHO Group Misko Suvakovic, 2010	Misko Suvakovic	P2482
Pbl	The Onda Report, 2009		P1182
Pbl	Land of Human Rights, 2009		P1175
Pbl	Transeuropéennes: Theater and the Public Space, 2009	Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes	P2619
Pbl	Dramaturgy on Shifting Ground, 2009	Hans-Thies Lehmann and Patrick Primavesu	A0302
Pbl	Clothes for Living and for Dying, 2008	Margareta Kern,	P1074
Pbl	Expedition - European Platform for Artistic Exchanges, 2008		P1179
Pbl	International Experimental Arts Project: Experimental Arts in Europe, 2007		P1728
Pbl	Emergences Culturelles En Europe 25++	Various	DO748
Pbl	New Phenomena in Polish Art after 2000, 2007	Various	P1490

Pbl	Contemporary Theatres in Europe, 2006	Joe Kelleher and Nicholas Ridout	P0805
Pbl	Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement, 2006	André Lepecki	P2766
Pbl	Situationist International Anthology, 2006	Ken Knabb	P2870
Pbl	Birmingham - Europe - The World, 2004	Stan's Cafe	P0690
Pbl	European Social Forum, 2004	Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination	EF5080
Pbl	European Corrections Corporation, 2004	Martin Krenn, Oliver Ressler	P0999
Pbl	Grounded in Europe: Tanztheater and its Legacy, 2002	Philip Beaven	A0414
Pbl	Democracy Unrealized - Documenta11_Platform 1, 2002	Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya	P1033
Pbl	Arbeit Macht Frei In Toitland Europa (Freedom through work in the Deathland of Europe), Theatre Cent, 2001	Dan Urian	A0389
Pbl	Valentine, 2000	Monica Ross	P0194
Pbl	Body and The East - From 1960s to the Present, 1998	Zdenka Badovinac - Curator	P0854
Pbl	The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society, and Responsibility, 1994	Various	P1904



Pbl	Freedom through work in the Deathland of Europe, 1993	Dan Urian	A0213
Pbl	Cultural Diversity in the Arts – Art, Art Policies and the Facelift of Europe, 1993		P2020
DVD	herbst: Theorie zur Praxis, 2015		D2175
DVD	My Body My Territory, 2015		D2925
DVD	European Studies in Culture and Policy: Beyond Reasonable Doubt, 2014	Sandra Johnston	P2322
DVD	Performing the East: Performance Art in Russia, Latvia and Poland Since 1980, 2013	Amy Bryzgel	P2653
DVD	Santiago Sierra: The Black Cone - Monument to Civil Disobedience, 2013	Santiago Sierra	P2467
DVD	re.act.feminism #2 - a performing archive, 2013	Bettina Knaup and Beatrice Ellen Stammer,	P2391
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DVD	European Year of Disabled People - Legacy	Full Circle Arts and Arts Council England	D0245



## Acknowledgements

Cover Photograph: 'Apátrida por voluntad propia (Stateless by choice)' by Núria Güell

Image 1: 'This Sea is Mine' by Dictaphone Group. Photo by Housssam Mchaimesh

Image 2: 'Teeth Show' by Natasha Davis. Photo by Lucy Cash

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## The Author

**Alessandra Cianetti** is a Live Art curator, producer and writer. She is co-director of the London-based art organisation Something Human. Among the organisation's activities, since 2013 she has been conceiving, producing and coordinating live and visual art projects across Europe and Southeast Asia in partnership with institutions such as the Barbican Centre, Deptford Lounge, City of Skopje, and with the support, among others, of the Arts Council England and the European Cultural Foundation. She has worked with international arts and cultural organisations and institutions on numerous contemporary arts and culture events. These include artists' development projects and performances with New Work Network and socially engaged art projects with the drawing shed in London; cultural policies conferences with the Italian Ministry of Culture and Tor Vergata University in Rome (Italy); exhibitions, festivals and publishing projects with Fefe' Project and Les Flaneurs in Rome; and photography exhibitions with Ikona Gallery in Venice (Italy). Alessandra recently graduated at the MRes Art: Theory and Philosophy at the Central Saint Martins, UAL, London.

# Performing Borders - Appendix

## A Study Room Guide



Compiled & written by Alessandra Cianetti

2017



Live Art  
Development  
Agency

## **Performing Borders Appendix - A Study Room Guide appendix by Alessandra Cianetti**

Performing Borders Study Room Guide and its appendix explore the ways Live Art practices have been responding to the notion of borders, both physical and conceptual. As a 'border practice' that crosses and pushes boundaries, Live Art has been one of the most responsive ways in which artists have been addressing the shifting notion of borders and connected societal issues. From this perspective, the ephemerality, flexibility and resilience of Live Art become a privileged way to investigate urgent current political changes and struggles within and across borders. This Guide explores the notion of border in relation to Live Art and the works of experimental artists that have been addressing issues around physical borders, with a special focus on the current European situation and its multiple crises.

This Appendix follows the previous Performing Borders Study Room Guide published in October 2016 and includes the latest interviews of the blog 'performingborders. Live Art | crossings | europe' with Live Artists, academics and arts professionals Kay Syng Tan (October 2016), Federica Mazzara (November 2016), Lisa Alexander (December 2016), Michaela Crimmin (January 2017) and Lucia Palmero (February 2017). 'performingborders. Live Art | crossings | europe' is an exploration of Live Artists who are responding to the challenging notion of contemporary borders and the shifting concept of Europe. The first phase of this research project run from February 2016 to February 2017, each month the blog published an interview with an artist, academic or art professional, as a way to open up the debate on what the contemporary meaning of border in Live Art is and how artists are addressing this issue within Europe.

All the interviewees: Lois Keidan (February 2016) | Tania El Khoury (March 2016) | Núria Güell (April 2016) | Helena Walsh (May 2016) | Almir Koldzic (June 2016) | Natasha Davis (July 2016) | Marilena Zaroulia (August 2016) | Sara Zaltash (September 2016) | Kai Syng Tan (October 2016) | Federica Mazzara (November 2016) | Lisa Alexander (December 2016) | Michaela

Crimmin (January 2017) | Lucia Palmero (February 2016).

**performingborders Blog website:** [performingborders.wordpress.com](http://performingborders.wordpress.com)

**Performing Borders LADA Study Room Guide:**

[thisisliveart.co.uk/blog/performing-borders-study-room-guide](http://thisisliveart.co.uk/blog/performing-borders-study-room-guide)



**INTERVIEWS: Live Art, Crossings, Europe (October 2016 – February 2017)**

**KAI SYNG TAN | OCTOBER 2016**

**Alessandra Cianetti: Let's talk about running (my sport-related worst**

nightmare!). While in the September interview artist Sara Zaltash explores walking as a Live Art medium, since 2014 you have been presenting RUN! RUN! RUN! An 'international body for research' that 'examines the body and mind in motion (such as via running) as a creative and critical toolkit for the individual to engage with the self, others, the city and the world around us, and non-logocentric modes of thinking' that so far has been presented at Documenta (Germany), Centre for Contemporary Arts (Warsaw), Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting (Chicago) and ANTI Festival (Finland), amongst others. How did you come to running (but also swimming, islandhopping, spinning, drowning) as 'critical/creative modes of interrogation/intervention'? And, how do you neutralise the 'competitiveness' of these activities in what you define a non-hierarchical art and humanity discourse that has the nature of 'productive antagonism', potential and in between space?

**Kai Syng Tan:** Yes, I set up RUN! RUN! RUN! to, well, run solo and collaborative work – and the activities will jolt you from your nightmare – because what we do is not so much about running as a 'sport' or exercise, but how its physical and poetic processes can be mobilised as metaphor, methodology and material to enable us to reimagine ourselves and the world around us.

For instance, in the workshop at Documenta, participants ran for all of two minutes, to think and talk about how running affects what and how they think and talk. The commission in Finland was a series of running 'masterclasses' conducted by world-class running experts – ages seven to 14 – to teach adults (top age: 84) how to re-cultivate fun and silliness, to give them the permission to trip over, to throw tantrums and to giggle.

I picked up running in 2009 because it can be fun and silly (in theory at least, although it is not always the case in real life for a middle-aged beginner). After all, as toddlers, soon as we could walk, we ran – until our parents and teachers reprimanded us. The same way an artist may use bronze, acrylic or data, I mobilise running. Running, and previously, swimming, hula hopping and so on, because it is of and by the body.

Running, because it is about putting one foot after the other, without the need for equipment or even shoes. Running, because intellectuals have insisted on mocking it as a 'futile' (Baudrillard) 'New Age myth' (Zizek), and preferred walking as the 'sensitive, spiritual act' that has built 'Western civilisation' (French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut) — ignoring the fact that artists do use running (in a 'sensitive' and 'spiritual' way), such as artist Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba and his *Breathing is Free: 12,756.3*, an ongoing performance since 2007, in an attempt to physically experience world refugee crisis by running the diameter of the earth, 12,756.3km. Running — instead of flying, like Icarus — because it is mundane and everyday. You do not have to 'go for a run', you can run after a bus (or not). And way before it became popular for people to 'go for a run' (and there are many — more than 2 million people a week in England — who do so today), our ancestors had had to run when hunting for food, two million years ago. So biologically and neurologically, human beings are 'tailor made' to run. Aside from our enormous buttocks (*maximus gluteus*) and that have no use whatsoever for walking, human beings have cultivated cognitive skills such as 'the retention and recall of the details (topography, potential food sources, water sources, etc) of large areas of land', and a 'long-range vision' or ability to project and extrapolate, from having to chase for 6, 7 hours after an antelope in the African planes. Running — rather than 'jogging' — because if you cannot physically run, you can metaphorically do so. The word 'run' has no less than eighty-one definitions and expressions in the Oxford English Dictionary. So its poetic potential is endless, including expressions like 'letting your imagination run riot', being on the run', 'running into', and 'running against'.

The expressions 'running into' and 'running against' are at the heart of 'productive antagonisms', a conceptual framework which collaborator geographer Dr Alan Latham and I have come up with. At its most basic, this refers to the facilitation of a kind of potential space, a between space where the usual norms of disciplinary practice are temporarily suspended. At a broader level, it is about a mode of working with and through difference. The workshop in Finland for instance was about exploring the creative sparks that could emerge from collisions and frictions of dissimilar people and elements: of generation (adults, teenagers, children); of disciplinary



backgrounds (Alan is a geographer, I am an artist); of cultures (Finland, Singapore — where I am from originally, New Zealand — where Alan yields, and UK — our adopted home). If it was competitive, it was a competition against time — to come up with a ‘work’ after just 4 hours of workshopping with the children. And with my kind of timing for the 10 races I have competed, I think it is illegal for me to talk about competitiveness and running in the same sentence. (For the record, it was 4 hours 24 minutes for the 2011 London Marathon and 1 hour 53 minutes 01 seconds for the 2012 KNI Walthamstow Forest Half Marathon. Go on, mock me),

That said, the sportiness and competitiveness of running can be interesting, too. In a digital work that I created in 2015, instead of neutralising the competitive nature of running, I played it up. By drawing a satirical parallel between the gruelling (and exorbitant) journeys that migrants undertake to seek asylum in Europe, with the gruelling (and exorbitant) endurance races that niche but expanding groups of people from the ‘first world’ subject themselves to in the name of fitness, adventure or self-fulfillment, Certainly the Toughest UltraMarathon of Your Life is a map of Europe that critiques the demonisation of migrants by mainstream media and Nimbies (‘not in my backyard’, people who oppose to something that happens in their immediate surroundings, such as a ‘swarm’ of immigrants).

**AC: This work is directly linked in terms of telling stories of Syrian refugees with the 2013 commission by Spielart Festival in Munich *Stories of Refuge*. An audio-video participative installation that ‘tells the story of three Syrian asylum seekers who fled Syria and sought refuge in Munich’ after having paid a lot, both financially and emotionally, to be smuggled into Europe and risking their lives. As you describe it on your website, ‘we gave each of the three participants a small discreet video camera that they smuggled into their camps, and asked them to film a day in their lives as asylum seekers in Munich’. Moreover, the audience was asked to lie on bunk beds and was also able to leave some notes and thoughts in black notebooks left in each bed. How did you involve the participants, and what was the value for them of being part of this project? How was the audience response to the piece?**

**KST:** I met various people in Munich and not all of them were keen to tell their stories for various reasons. Some people had just arrived and were worried about talking about what had happened to them and by that maybe endanger family members who are still in Syria. Others were worried about their legal status in Munich because in many situations there are details you focus on and others you might not tell to the authorities, the narratives you share with your friends are definitely different from the ones you tell to the authorities of the country you would like to be hosted by; there are various and conflicting narratives at play in these situations. In the end I worked with three people who were willing to tell us their stories. Their identity was hidden and it was an open process; they chose how to present their stories. We built a relationship with the participants, as they understood that I come first from a position of solidarity rather than from a journalistic approach.

When we presented *Stories of Refuge* in 2013 there was less attention on the topic as it wasn't at the centre of the public discourse. Members of the audience were really sweet leaving tips and suggestions to the refugees, telling them that they were welcome, and that Munich gets better with time. I think it definitely would have been different if the piece was presented now in Munich.

**AC:** Your exploration of the migratory condition started early in your career, let's think for example of your *Leave to Remain* piece of 2010, were you explored your own tale as an immigrant in the UK. In light of recent international developments in terms of people fleeing zones of conflict and border crossing, which are major themes your practice is addressing at the moment, how do you think your work has been changing over the years?

**TEK:** *Leave to Remain* was more of a personal story and using something autobiographical is quite different from talking about big numbers of people fleeing wars. You don't want to self-victimise and you want to be aware of your privileges, because at the end of the day I was able to be here and live here, study and get citizenship. Each piece really depends on the space and place it is presented. 'Stories of Refuge' definitely would have been

different if it was presented here in the UK and now. In the UK there is obviously what the government's stand is with the Home Secretary Theresa May's speeches that show a lot of pride in closing borders, and she is even calling for a change of the legal framework around refugee status. So my work depends on the context, the space and whose story I am telling.

I don't think that the passage from more autobiographical works to pieces such as *Gardens Speak* and *Stories of Refuge* is a change in my politics in terms of being against borders and being against discrimination over borders, but now there is more urgency in discussing this because people are actually fleeing wars in which a lot of these big governments are involved directly or indirectly. There is a human responsibility, a political responsibility and an artistic responsibility to respond from the point of view of the people telling their stories.

**AC:** Through a catchy pop aesthetics **RUN! RUN! RUN!** addresses socio-political issues like in your proposal **Front(ier) Runner** where — although at the moment details are top secret — you aim to run along borders, including invisible/clearly defined/faded/imaginary ones such as 'Scotland and England; Schengen Europe; where Berlin Wall stood; along what will become the new wall between Hungary and Serbia; along the North and South Korean border; San Andreas Fault'. I would add the possible Calais new wall/border we are scarily hearing of these days. Can you tell us a bit more about this project and how do you address the notion of border?

**KST:** Human beings — as individuals, societies, tribes, nations, etc — have always built borders, boundaries, boxes, walls, and fences. These borders may be physical, like the Neolithic walls of Jericho 10,000 years ago, the Great Wall of China 2300 years ago, as Guardian journalist Andrew Brown points out, or metaphoric such as trade walls, as another Guardian journalist Andrew Solomon highlights, or imaginary like Trump's fantasy/farcical wall. Yet, history has also shown that whenever and wherever walls are up, 'people find ways to go round them', says François Guennoc of Auberge des Migrants, a French aid group working in Calais in Solomon's article.

As a migrant, woman, academic, artist, teacher and someone neurologically-wired differently (with ADHD, dyspraxia and dyslexia), I consider borders — visible, invisible (which are more insidious than those you can see), political, disciplinary, natural, professional — as artificial lines of division to be crossed, challenged, complicated, shifted, teased, pushed. (That said I have also precisely created multiple boxes with the ‘declaration’ and definitions at the start of this statement about who/ what I am — although those identities are not fixed but modulated, modified, further multiplied; thus another ‘box’ or label that I use to describe myself is ‘shapeshifter’). Closed walls means closed thinking. Glass ceilings are to be smashed, party lines by dictators to be crossed, gates to be crashed, limits to be pushed, bars to be metaphorically raised, and, just to continue with my rhyming roll, Mars to be reached (though not arrogantly conquered, as Kevin Fong, an expert in space medicine, warns). If too stubbornly-entrenched to be toppled or knocked down, the least we can do is to mock, and knock, criticise, and create leakages, cracks and fissures on these borders, so that things can slip through, pollute, corrupt and disturb that which are walled in, protected or kept out. In 2004 Francis Alys walked 24km along Jerusalem, leaking 58 litres of green paint along the way. In 1964, in an act of what a writer calls ‘subversion by an irritation’, Joseph Beuys recommended that the Berlin wall should be raised by 5cm so that the proportions can become ‘beautiful’ (Poerksen 2011). I am not much of a fan of Suzanne Moore (or Beuys for that matter) but agree with she says about Beuys’s proposal in the context of the imminent Calais wall today:

‘It is good to be reminded that there are those who build walls but there are those who will build ladders over them. That is called hope.’ (Moore 2016)

My preferred mode of crossing, or ladder-building, and subversion by irritation is by running. Running is a fit comeback in a few ways. In running you talk about ‘hitting the wall’ — reaching a point when you are physically and mentally bankrupt and cannot move on — and you talk about ways to overcome that (pacing yourself better, fuelling more regularly etc). I have also argued for a mode of running that is defiantly, stubbornly and tantrum-mishly (?) childish, child-like, mundane, anarchic, unruly, simple, simplistic,

light-footed, and light-hearted. Writing at the age of 61, the American author and runner Joyce Carol Oates notes that she ‘never saw a “No Trespassing” sign that wasn’t a summons to my rebellious blood. Such signs, dutifully posted on trees and fence railings, might as well cry, “Come Right In!”’ (1999).

My application of so-called ‘pop aesthetics’ — blinding colours and catchy slogans — is part of my means to irritate the ‘canon’ erected by the often white, male, important (and sometimes self-important and drugged-out) artists and others who have walked before us. Think Charles Baudelaire while *On Wine and Hashish*, Richard Long and his *A Line Made By Walking*, Iain Sinclair around the M25, Will Self everywhere as a self-proclaimed 21st century flaneur and Jesus Christ on water, while carrying a cross, across the hellhole of this world (that he’s created?), and so on (obviously, there are plenty of self-important male runners, and self-important non-white non-male non-runners too). Rather than merely following in their footsteps I want to up the speed — literally by running — and up the game.

Front(ier) Running is just one of about eight proposals I have created in the past three years or so on the theme of running along borders. In Front(ier) Running, I propose to create GPS drawings and leave a digital trace (after all, the ‘digital’ refers to the digits of the foot, too) while run along borders, such as between the two Koreas or along the Hungarian wall. As Alys says, sometimes ‘doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can become poetic’.

In another, a film about and shot ‘on the run’, I will run in the Right to Movement marathon in Palestine and chat with co-runners. The annual marathon is thus called because movement is a human right, according to Article 13 of the UN Human Rights Charter. Runners run ‘from the Church of Nativity, along the Wall, through two refugee camps and turnaround point in a checkpoint’, according to the website.

In this case, running is a visual expression and indeed demonstration of this freedom.

When the building of the Calais wall was announced, I sketched another proposal, *Life On The Run / Running Into Difference*, to run with Calais residents — those who are ‘native’ as well as recent — along it. This ‘run’ will be more of a skip. Not with skipping rope but a jaunty, time-consuming, frivolous, inefficient — and irritating — hop.

Get in touch if you are a potential participant (or potential funder).

**AC: This year you have been touring your project HAND-IN-HAND in both Grenoble Festival, France and the Whitworth Art Gallery, UK as a post-Brexit reflection in which, referencing thinker Matthew Taylor’s call to ‘a cycle of hope and unity’ within the post-referendum discourse, you created a collective experience aimed at subverting and sabotaging the UK Home Office rules about refugees in Calais. Would you mind to tell us a bit more about the project and how it was received in both cities?**

**KST:** *Main Dans La Main / Hand In Hand* is a participatory artwork that asks: amidst a volatile and hostile reality, how could image-makers, researchers and ‘ordinary citizens’ invent everyday poetic/political/playful interventions to celebrate difference? What could ‘wellbeing’ mean in an unwell world? I designed ribbons and invited people to tether themselves to strangers, and share their hopes for the future while running. Participants could decide if they wanted to cover 1 metre, 10km, or 100km, or to walk, use a wheelchair or skateboard while tethered. I wanted to create a celebratory demonstration — in both senses of the word — of cooperation and conversation. From my own work in critical disability (for instance working on the ASEAN Para Games Opening and Closing Ceremonies 2015 as Visual Director), I had been inspired by how blind people can enjoy running. This is done through tethering themselves to another — although not without first establishing a sense of trust with this other person. The design of the tether was a response to how asylum seekers in Cardiff had to wear red wristbands to gain food rations. By utilising something celebratory — in this case customised, red ribbons — I wanted to subvert the ‘handcuffs’ that ostracise the migrants. *Hand-in-Hand* thus becomes a

methodology and metaphor to détourn and sabotage something aggressive and antagonistic, into something positive and creative, particularly against the backdrop of what Taylor has called 'dark and dangerous times' (I'll return to Taylor in the next question).

Hand-In-Hand was commissioned for the Fete de Tuiles (Festival of Tiles) street festival that celebrates the beginnings of the French revolution, and which attracted 100,000 people this year. My segment was part of a 6-hour race curated by Florent Cholat. The runners found it hard to run tethered — and did not last long! You can see parts of what they said in this short film I made.

That was in early June. Then came Brexit. So when I was invited by the Whitworth Art Gallery (Manchester) to do something in July as part of Culture Shots festival which blends culture with wellbeing, I decided to re-run Hand-in-Hand. My audience with a group of trainee nurses from the Manchester Royal Infirmary as part of their training module on wellbeing — which was ideal, given our unwell world. The nurses decided to walk rather than run, which they did around the adjacent Whitworth Park. They appreciated the 'inconvenience' of the experience — and talked about how it made them more thoughtful and considerate of how and where they move. The exercise was short, but they managed to share their dreams — such as where they were going for holidays in Summer!

I have been invited to run the work with first year undergraduates of the Visual Communications course at Leeds College of Art in October, so I am keen to understand how so-called millennials relate to one another in our strange world.

**AC: Your collaborative practice seems to seek an intimacy with the participants where a safe and trusted space is created for them. How do you think these Live Art interventions feed into a broader conversation on how art can create a possible collective future? How do you blend it with one of your sources of inspiration, as stated in your Manifesto, the Situationist International's 'revolution of everyday life'?**

**KST:** First of all, I think we would agree that at the heart of this discussion of a 'collective future' is the assumption — or the 'hope' that Suzanne Moore talked about — that art can be transformative. This seems to go hand-in-hand with Matthew Taylor's cry for 'clever, concrete, creative ways of bringing a better more humane future into the here and now', to battle despair and division. David Shrigley's recently unveiled fourth plinth at Trafalgar Square — an oversized thumbs-up, in bronze which the artist has described as 'an incitement to optimism' as well as 'a work about making the world a better place... which obviously is a ridiculous proposition, but I think it's a good proposition' — would fit that example of a (literally) concrete counterpoint to insularity and pessimism.

The Situationists' psychogeographical tactics would also be fitting examples, but I want to temper their often macho, chest-beating rhetoric with another brand of anarchism — albeit one that is a sinologist Chad Hansen described as 'gentle anarchism'. Favoured by Chinese philosopher Lao Zi 2500 years ago, wuwei is an 'opposition to authority, government, coercion, and even to normal socialisation in values' characterised by 'distinct ambivalence, indirect, non-argumentative style, use of poetry and parable'. At its best, wuwei is 'a new spirit of naturalness' which should 'inform and transform everything we do', to enable us to 'realise the need for a fundamental change in the way we live', and bring about a 'radical reorientation of the way we do things', explains another sinologist Cheuk Yin Lee.

An example of a Live Art intervention that draws out this spirit of gentle anarchism and works as a quiet yet powerful comeback to the 'dark and dangerous' times would be Glasgow-based artist Rosana Cade's Walking:Holding, which I have happily learnt about after performing Hand-in-Hand. In a work first created five years ago, Cade goes for a walk with an audience member through their town or city, and invites them to 'hold hands with six different individuals along the way. The hand-holders are local participants who range in age, gender, race, sexuality and background. The idea is to give people an opportunity to experience their hometown from someone else's perspective; and to see what can happen when you share an intimate act with a complete stranger' (Cade 2016).



The striking images documenting the performance published on Cade's website are potent proofs of the poetry and clarity of the piece. I think Cade's work draws out Claire Bishop's 2004 well known and indeed well-critiqued notion of 'relational antagonism', which conceptualises the setting up of "relationships" that emphasize the role of dialogue and negotiation', and which are 'marked by sensations of unease and discomfort rather than belonging' and 'sustains a tension among viewers, participants, and context', rather than a contrived conviviality or 'imposed consensus of authoritarian order'. A participant of Cade's work notes that he felt 'completely outside my comfort zone' walking with a tall young man, in spite, or because, of the fact that 'it's 2016 and this is my town', Reading, which he has lived in for 30 years. He was also struck by his experience of the work with a young woman in an electric wheelchair 'who said that she rarely held anyone's hand in when walking out and about, mostly because of the physical/logistical difficulty the wheelchair created'. He ends by saying that 'I'd really recommend people give it a go. It only lasted 30 minutes, and if you don't like it you can just walk away'. Cade's work precisely shows how such a collective future is necessarily a messy, difficult and lively cacophony. In other words, what you have described as an 'intimacy' and 'safe and trusted space' should not be a neat, rose-tinted master narrative with a happily-ever-after we-are-the-world flatness based on lowest common denominators. Instead it includes and indeed cultivates conflict, clashes, collisions.

Minus the bloodshed.

**AC: In your 'terrifying, terrific and transformative years in Japan' you explored the aesthetic concept of 'ma' (in between). In-betweenness seems to have a huge part in your practice. Can you expand a bit on how those years have impacted on your work and how you have brought the concept of 'ma' in your following projects?**

**KST:** As we move about in the world, we sometimes run into people, ideas, and stuffs that hit us in the face and WHAM! — stops us in our tracks, in a powerful way — and then we fly with it. You are right in saying that 'ma' has

influenced my work and I think it is clear that productive antagonisms bears its spirit. I encountered 'ma', a notion about in betweenness, and specifically the tension (and not a flattening or harmonisation) in between elements, when I was living in Japan. The word spirit is appropriate here: whether moments of silence in a kabuki play, or the gaps between the rocks in a rock garden, 'ma' visualises and conceptualises a potentiality where the spirit (kami) moves through (Isozaki & Oshima 2009). It is a powerful and poetic spatio-temporal principle underlying all traditional Japanese art forms, and which I have written about elsewhere (see [here](#) and [here](#), for instance).

'Ma' was the guiding principle behind 'ISLANDHOPPING' (2002-2005), a large, multi-platform body of performances, installations and films that explore the physical, political and poetic significance of 'island' and 'islandhopping'. It asks: What are the 'zones of contacts and conflicts' (to borrow the words of Biennale of Sydney Dr Charles Merewether) between islanders and 'islands' — in the physical, geopolitical and metaphorical senses of the word? What happens when the various stories and histories from these places and people are juxtaposed within the same physical or filmic space? What (new) tensions/collisions are created, and how do they enrich or complicate what we (think we) know about these places and people? Over the period of 3 years, I travelled between — islandhopped — various islands of Japan, from Okinawa to Hokkaido. I collected a wide range of photographs, videos, sounds, texts and stories from the people and places I encountered, as an islander (from Singapore) encountering other islanders (in and of Japan).

A major 'archipelago' of stories, for instance, relates to the Pacific War. They include stories about my visits to the controversial Yasukuni war shrine in Tokyo while impersonating as a Japanese; the peace ceremony at Hiroshima in which the narrative of Japan as victim is propagated, as well as an American military camp in Okinawa (filmed with a hidden camera). Interspersed within these stories is an interview with an elderly uncle of his ordeal during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. As I — and the audience — hopped from 'island' to 'island' and story to story in the form of densely-montaged films or densely-packed installation site, the boundaries

between victim/victor, truth/fiction may become blurred.

An integral part of the process of ISLANDHOPPING was the engagement in artistic collaborations with Japanese practitioners. That is to say, ISLANDHOPPING acted as a mechanism for me to reach out to Japanese artists so that I did not function as an 'island' myself. Successful interdisciplinary and intercultural collaborations I carried out included that with dancers (including a Butoh expert and a choreographer from avant garde group Dumb Type), musicians (such as noise artist Adachi Tomomi and 'laptop composer' Professor Christophe Charles), and media artists (such as from Videoart Centre Tokyo). My current body of work continues with collaboration across culture, discipline and borders.

**AC: Finally, let us know a bit more about your coming projects.**

**KST:** o keep me on my toes, I work on approximately 487 projects at any one time (my life is a ride, life is art, art is life, etc).

The one that could be of interest to people here is a seminar in Leeds on 21 November. Drawing on the (anti)migrant crisis, global endurance athletic activities and Nguyen-Hatsushiba's Breathing is Free: 12,756.3, we will ask how running connects or divide people across borders. The line-up is eclectic, which includes Dr Debbie Lisle (Reader. Politics and International Studies, Queen's University Belfast, Reader in international relations, Sarah Brown (Leeds Art Gallery Principal Keeper and runner), and Stephanie Case, a Canadian human rights lawyer who founded Free To Run, a running charity for Afghan girls and women. That is if she is not on a UN assignment, or running a 338-km race (as you do).

This 'Leeds Leg' as we call it is one of a series of three events in three cities exploring running as a metaphor or methodology to think about body, ageing, gender, the city and borders. Myself with two other female artist-researcher-runners Annie Grove-White and Dr Carali McCall will be joined by guests and colleagues including A Mile In Her Shoes, a running charity for homeless women in London (23 November), and Eddie Ladd, an international performance maker who's made a theatre piece on Bobby

Sands (24 November, Cardiff). The Biennale draws on the RUN! RUN! RUN! International Festival of Running 2014, which took place at the Slade Research Centre, which the Guardian applauded for its 'positive atmosphere'. Come join us , if not physically, virtually by following the #r3fest tag on Twitter.

***Kai Syng Tan*** is an artist, visual director, sightseer and shape-shifter. Her works have toured 450 shows including dOCUMENTA, 8th ASEAN Para Games Ceremonies, Biennale of Sydney and transmediale at locations such as MOMA, ZKM, ICA and Dom Muzyki. Upon completing her PhD at the Slade School of Fine Art, she founded the RUN! RUN! RUN! International Body for Research to explore running as a critical and creative toolkit to engage with the self, others, the city, technology and non-logocentric modes of thinking. She has won the San Francisco International Film Festival Golden Gate Award and Japan Foundation artist-in-residency Award, while her works are collected by the Museum of London, Wellcome Images and Fukuoka Art Museum. Now a Research Fellow at Leeds College of Art, Kai is also Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts and a Peer Reviewer of the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

## To know more about Kay Syng Tan's practice:

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIW=Digital link/Website; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

Additional resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
DIW	International Body of Research	Kay Syng Tan	<a href="http://www.kaisyngtan.com">www.kaisyngtan.com</a>
DIW	RUN! RUN! RUN! Biennale	Kay Syng Tan	<a href="http://www.kaisyngtan.com/r3fest">www.kaisyngtan.com/r3fest</a>
DIW	Hand-In-Hand (Short Film), 2016	Kay Syng Tan	<a href="https://vimeo.com/172991771">https://vimeo.com/172991771</a>
DIA	Review of RUN! RUN! RUN! Biennale 2016 Leeds Leg	Dr David Hindley (Nottingham Trent University)	<a href="http://bit.ly/2iL0dGw">http://bit.ly/2iL0dGw</a>
DIA	'What has running got to do with our divided world?', 2016	Kay Syng Tan	<a href="http://bit.ly/2g1jAdr">http://bit.ly/2g1jAdr</a>
DIA	'Hand-in-Hand: Activating the body in motion to re-connect with ourselves and others amidst a world in motion and commotion (France, Italy, UK)', 2016	Kay Syng Tan	<a href="http://bit.ly/2cU36Tr">http://bit.ly/2cU36Tr</a>
DIA	'Tough Ultramarathons and Life on the Run', Transfers. Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies, 2017	Kay Syng Tan	<a href="http://bit.ly/2eb0BzN">http://bit.ly/2eb0BzN</a>
DIC	'Free Thinking', 11th January 2017	BBC Radio 3 / Panel Discussion	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b087yrll">http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b087yrll</a>



**Alessandra Cianetti:** Federica, with our conversation we are leaving the realm of Live Art to enter that of aesthetics. Since 2008, alongside your academic research, you have been writing the blog 'Moving Borders: The Aesthetics of Migration'; a great resource on cultures of migration. Lately you have also been researching the aesthetics of subversion within migratory contexts. How would you define these two perspectives on aesthetics and their relation within your work?

**Federica Mazzara:** The two things are not separated, rather the contrary. I created the blog 'Moving Borders. The Aesthetics of Migration' (that I have recently renamed 'Moving Borders. Migration and The Aesthetics of Subversion') during my time as a post-doctoral fellow at UCL (2007-2009), as a way to keep track of the numerous initiatives, including my own, revolving around migration and cultural expression, happening almost on a daily basis in the UK and in other geographical spaces. I realized this was a vibrant field and I needed a way to record and share scattered thoughts about the importance of artistic forms in relation to the pressing phenomenon of migration. What I started gathering is that there was an alternative way to look at what is commonly framed as a 'crisis' and especially as a political and economical matter. Back then, I noticed migration was actually becoming a source of inspiration for amazing thinkers, artists and activists who were in search of alternative discourses, narratives and representations around this controversial issue. This is how I encountered the concept of 'migratory aesthetics' by Mieke Bal, a visual cultural scholar I had admired for years. Bal recognizes that aesthetics is a realm where action is possible and can have effects, and this is especially true in migratory contexts, where aesthetics has the power to promote a process of subjectification of the migrants' (and refugees) experience, who should not be nameless, faceless bodies to be observed, but subjects with voices, faces and stories to be told. The idea here is that art has a potential that mainstream discourses do not have, which is 'to open up the possible visibility of situations, issues, events and people and to leave it to its

viewers or readers to enact that visibility; to answer that call by seeing'<sup>70</sup>. In 2008, I hosted Mieke Bal's installation 'Nothing is Missing' at UCL, that translates this abstract concept into art practice. That was a great experience for me as a scholar interested in how to frame differently and dismantle the current (un-)representation of the migrants' experience. My idea of 'aesthetics of subversion' is directly connected to this early stage of my research. I am now using this expression to name a series of increasingly more challenging acts of subversion that blend art, activism and politics. In particular, I apply this concept to the controversial space of Lampedusa.

**AC: During the Summer you have been curating a special issue of 'Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture' on the Lampedusa Island (by the way thanks for inviting me to review Ila Sheren's 'Portable Borders!'): 'Lampedusa: Cultural and Artistic Spaces for Migrant Voices'. How have you made the migrants' voices louder and heard in this issue?**

**FM:** This issue is a direct product of my interest in the aesthetics of subversion in relation to Lampedusa. It brings together a variegated group of people who include academics, activists, filmmakers, and artists, some of whom have personally experienced the journey in one of the 'boats of death' used to cross the Sicilian Channel, in the attempt to reach Lampedusa and thereby Europe. The articles presented here share the view that within the so-called 'migrant crisis' of at least the past two decades, Lampedusa has been used as the stage of a spectacle (De Genova 2005; Cuttitta 2014), where migrants are only allowed to appear in their desolation and misery, with no possibility to subjectify the experience of migrating itself, which could allow them to recover their dignity and voices within a predominantly hostile Europe, which often rejects them and the reasons for their passage.

All the contributions to this issue embrace a view that considers migrants

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<sup>70</sup> Mieke Bal, Miguel Á Hernández-Navarro (eds.), *Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture Conflict, Resistance and Agency*, (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2011), p. 9.



as individuals with autonomy, subjects of power that are able to challenge the biased representation of them as criminals or victims, depending on the framework applied, respectively the securitarian or humanitarian one. The contributors to this issue include activist and filmmaker Ilaria Vecchi, who is part of a local Lampedusa collective called Askavusa; Valentina Zagaria, anthropologist and theatre director, author of *Miraculi*, a play about Lampedusa based on collective ethnographic research on the island; Alessandro Triulzi, Gianluca Gatta, Dagmawi Yimer, Zakaria Mohamed Ali and Mahamed Aman, all members – with different roles – of the Archivio Memorie Migranti (Archive of Migrant Memories) based in Rome, the most important hub in Italy that promote migrants: their self-narration and representation; Gabriella Ghermandi, a writer and performer whose art is an expression of the strive to cope with the arduousness of migrating and adapting in a cultural space that does not respect your identity and values and Maya Ramsay, a London-based artist with a sophisticated view on the issues of migration, death and invisibility.

**AC: Lately you have been quite vocal against both the label ‘crisis’ and of a specific view of refugees seen as faceless mass that has been propagated both by media and the cultural sector. Here I’m thinking as an example of your review of the multi-awarded documentary ‘Fuocoammare’ by Gianfranco Rosi. Would you mind to tell us a bit more about this view and what you think art should do to create a counter narrative?**

**FM:** Along with several other scholars, who have voiced their resistance towards the label ‘crisis’ to define the current global migratory passage (I am here thinking, among others, of Nicholas De Genova, Martina Tazzioli, Maurice Stierl, Charles Heller etc. Read their collective analysis of the problematic word ‘Crisis’ and its critical implications [here](#)), I strongly dislike this expression. We are not facing a ‘migrant crisis’, rather the crisis of the EU management of the peoples’ right to move and escape. I believe we need to contrast and oppose this misrepresentation of the issue of moving across borders, and I believe that art has the potential to subvert this way of thinking by exposing the viewers to commonly hidden perspectives, by allowing them to see through different lenses. This is why I do not like

Rosi's interpretation of the Lampedusa 'crisis'. Despite all the international praise received, Rosi's 'documentary' (?) limits itself to dragging the viewer into feelings of compassion and pity through a spectacle of suffering that locates the migrants – and to some extent also the locals – in spaces of invisibility they commonly inhabit in all mainstream representations, failing to encourage a more sophisticated understanding of the issue of immigration into Lampedusa and Europe. Migrants do not take the word in the film, apart from a few minutes when they describe how they are distributed in the boat or when they sing a song expressing their desperation, otherwise they appear exclusively in all their misery: crying, dirty, exhausted people freshly rescued by the 'heroes' of the Italian Navy, or – even worse – they appear as corpses, while the documentary fails to address the reasons behind their death.

As I stated in the review of the film I wrote for my blog, I think Rosi, as an intellectual who decides to engage with a pressing issue such as Lampedusa and migration, cannot limit himself to producing a poetic and sentimental film that asks the viewer to 'stay human'. This is NOT what we need, not anymore! We have had enough of sentimentalism and the humanitarian approach is not helping us understanding the real implications of this cruel and complicated story where we are all involved. We need to dismantle the paradox of a militarised/humanitarian travesty that has chosen Lampedusa as its ideal stage of a made up crisis. Why are these people escaping? Why are we not making their passage safe, while at the same time spending millions in order to rescue them from the perils of this very passage? Why not showing Lampedusa for what it is: the centre of a border spectacle about which the inhabitants are very aware; people who are resisting the travesty, who are concerned and reject the growing militarisation of their land, people who are tired of the politicians and celebrities parading on the island, inhabitants who do not want a Nobel prize for peace. Lampedusans want instead the EU to come to terms with its responsibility about a crisis that it has fabricated and to let the island deal with its old problems: lack of a proper hospital and playgrounds, run-down schools, disappearance of fishing etc. But all this has no voice in Rosi's 'documentary' (<http://movingborders.blogspot.co.uk/>).

Rosi's FILM (better calling it for what it is) scares me, or better what scares me is the unanimous praise for his film. It is a symptom of the fact that we are stuck in a close-minded and biased view, where migrants, in the best scenario, can only occupy the stage as victims to be rescued, while we, the 'rescuers', can be reassured that our humanitarian ethos is preserved.

**AC: Going back to the concept of performativity, in your research about the Lampedusa-based Askavusa collective and their Porto M project you talk about memory, anti-institutionalism and the museum as a space that redefine 'practices of representation by performing an aesthetics of subversion that prioritizes the performative dimension of the memorial event'<sup>71</sup>. Please, tell us more about this project and in what way the performative encounters refugees' memories in it.**

**FM:** Porto M is an interesting space created by the local Lampedusan collective Askavusa, used mostly – but not only – for displaying objects lost by migrants and refugees, or taken away from them, which they recovered from the 'boats of death' abandoned in the island's landfills. The first objects were found in 2005. Taking inspiration from the work of Iain Chambers, Lidia Curti and their team of scholars, I believe that spaces of memorialisation that link to migration, 'do not – to use Chambers' words – so much conserve and transmit memory as produce and elaborate it'<sup>72</sup>.

In Porto M ['Harbor M'] – where M stands for many different things according to their founders, including Mediterraneo (Mediterranean), Migrazione (Migration) Militarizzazione (Militarization), Mare (Sea), Memoria (Memory), Miscuglio (Mixing) and Mobilitazione (Mobilisation)], the objects are displayed quite randomly and relatively free from any attempt to define their story, belonging or function (see image). No labels, no cases are used to 'protect' them, to fix them in an ordered space and time. Objects are there as witnesses of an incomplete past, as mementos of a journey, where Lampedusa is more than a simple destination, it is a

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<sup>71</sup> F. Mazzara, *Objects, debris and memory of the Mediterranean passage: Porto M in Lampedusa*, in G. Proglia and L. Odasso (eds), *Crossing Border Lampedusa. Subjectivity, visibility and memory in stories of sea and land*, Palgrave 2017.

<sup>72</sup> Iain Chambers, "The Museum of Migrating Modernities," in *Cultural Memories, Migrating Modernities and Museum Practices*, ed. Beatrice Ferrara (Milan: Politecnico di Milano, 2012), 23.

place that participates in and shares the marginality and displacement experienced by the migrants and refugees. The 'energy released' by the objects is, according to the collective, impossible to define and fix and therefore it must interrupt any logic of archiving. The objects talk back to different viewers in different ways. Porto M has the potential to subvert traditional ways of preserving memory around migration by prioritizing the 'performative dimension of the memorial event', to use Curti's words, although issues of preservation still need to be addressed by the collective.

As part of this performative dimension of Porto M, I am particularly interested in the act of recycling the 'wasted' migrants' objects that characterises the artistic approach of Giacomo Sferlazzo, member of the Askavusa collective. The objects here provide the raw material for artworks that become the symbol of what I have previously defined as an 'aesthetics of subversion'.

I am currently organizing an exhibition in partnership with Counterpoint Arts and artist Maya Ramsay which will include Sferlazzo's artworks together with other art and video projects challenging and subverting the common narrative about the 'migrant crisis'. We aim at launching the exhibition during the next UK Refugees Week (19-25 June 2017). Stay tuned!

**AC: Borders, frontiers, boundaries and marginality. In your article 'Objects, debris and memory of the Mediterranean passage: Porto M in Lampedusa' you define margins as a 'space where it is possible to perform a certain form of resistance'. In what way do you think margins can become a site of production of cultural knowledge? How do you think a different approach to borders can contribute to overcome what you call the 'otherisation' of the refugees in the contemporary European context?**

**FM:** As the human geographer Nicholas De Genova has often stated: "migration exists because of borders, otherwise we would call it simply moving". This way of looking at borders has informed all my research on issues of migration and representation. People do not cross borders, it's the borders who cross them. Borders are porous, portable, they move

constantly and migrants and refugees show on a daily basis that the manufacturing of virtual obstacles has lots of flaws: no matter how many new borders the anti-migration advocates build, people will still move, cross and dismantle them. This is also how borders become places of resistance, places where to perform their struggle, their agency and power to subvert any possible attempt to irregularize their passages.

In this context, I think aesthetics plays a crucial role in revealing and disclosing the paradox of borders. Lampedusa is an incredibly interesting borderscape where two very different and incompatible dimensions coexist: migrants/refugees on the one hand and tourists on the other, the undesired and the desired. A highly militarised space where the Navy is present, on the one hand, to patrol our borders and protect us from the 'invasion' of migrants/refugees, and on the other to rescue them from the perils of the Sea and smugglers. Isn't this a paradox? Despite that, we accept it as a normal, inevitable cause/effect that we rarely, if ever, challenge. A different approach to borders would therefore imply, I think, a disclosure of all paradoxes and contradictions that characterise the governmental and media approach to this phenomenon. Even better if this is voiced by those who have undertaken the journey themselves, the migrants/refugees who manage to talk back once they are given the possibility. This is the case of filmmaker Dagmawi Yimer from Ethiopia and journalist Zakaria Mohamed Ali from Somalia, two asylum seekers who experienced the desperate crossing of the Sicilian Channel and who reached Lampedusa, an island of which they saw very little back then, apart from the dock where they disembarked and the centre where they were held for months. Once gained the right to tell their stories, they both decided to do so by using the documentary art, and both chose to go back, as free men, to the island of Lampedusa, the borderland of their rescue, to testify of how they see the island and to reveal a series of paradoxes that Rosi, for instance, failed to address. The two documentaries (Yimer's 'Nothing but the Sea' and Mohamed Ali's 'To Whom it May Concern') should be watched by all those who think that Rosi has created a masterpiece deserving an Oscar. You won't find any voyeurism on migrants' corpses or beautification of the military apparatus in these works, if you want to see this you need to watch Rosi's work; what you'll see is 'only' the faces (and voices) of the

‘undesired’ others and their attempt to come to terms with a place for which they have mixed feelings, a place that saved their lives, but also took away their dignity as individuals with stories, dreams and hopes, although there have been various initiatives within the island to favour a different visibility of migrants’ subjectivities.

These documentaries are examples of what I consider subversive political acts. In the attempt to express dissent, aesthetics becomes political, contributing to what Rancière (another source of inspiration for my work) calls ‘the distribution of the sensible’, where those who are commonly invisible take the time to reconfigure spaces and times, places and identities: “Politics occurs when those who ‘have no’ time take the time necessary to front up as inhabitants of a common space and demonstrate that their mouths really do emit speech capable of making pronouncement on the common, which cannot be reduced to voices signalling pain”.

It’s in this way, I think, that art can help us dissolving the most important borders...the mental ones.

**AC: Finally, tell us more about the direction of your research in the future and where we can meet you to know more about it.**

**FM:** I have been working on a monograph on Lampedusa, “Re-imagining Lampedusa: Migration from the Border Spectacle to the Aesthetics of Subversion” that I hope I will be able to conclude in a year’s time. It will be published with Peter Lang and will collect all my recent work on the issue of migration, aesthetics and Lampedusa. The exhibition in June, as mentioned before, will be my next important project. I will keep on posting on my blog and of course I will continue attending all your amazing events, Ale! So you can meet me there.

***Federica Mazzara is Senior Lecturer in Intercultural Communication at the University of Westminster. Her research revolves around migration in relation to cultural expression, with a focus on visual art. She is currently***

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<sup>73</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontent* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), pp. 24-25.

writing a book for Peter Lang on Lampedusa and the aesthetics of subversion. She has previously published on the literature of migration and on the relationship between literature and painting. Her recent publication include: 'Spaces of Visibility for the Migrants of Lampedusa', in L. Baracco (ed.), 'Re-imagining Europe's Borderlands: The Social and Cultural Impact of Undocumented Migrants on Lampedusa'. *Italian Studies*. 70: 4 (2015) 449-464; 'Performing a Postmigration Cinema in Italy. *Corazones de Mujer* by K. Kosoof'. *Modern Italy*, 18.1 (Jan. 2013), 41-53; "Subverting the Narratives of the Lampedusa Borderscape." *Special issue. Crossings. Journal of Migration and Culture* 7:2 (2016 forthcoming). This is a Special issue edited by Federica.

#### To know more about Federica Mazzara's research:

*Pbl* = Publication; *Art*= Article; *DF*= Digital File; *DIW*=Digital link/Website; *DIC*=Digital link/Conference; *DfC*=Digital file/Catalogue; *DIA*= Digital link/Article-interview

Additional resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
DIW	Moving Borders: The Aesthetics of Migration Blog	Federica Mazzara	<a href="http://movingborders.blogspot.co.uk/">http://movingborders.blogspot.co.uk/</a>
DIW	'Lampedusa: Cultural and Artistic Spaces for Migrant Voices' Special Issue of Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture (Volume 7, Issue 2)	Federica Mazzara (Editor)	<a href="http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-issue,id=3215/">http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-issue,id=3215/</a>

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**Alessandra Cianetti:** I first came across your work on current European issues at the symposium 'Crisis' in Excess: Performing Europe Today' organised by Marilena Zaroulia last March at Winchester University, and thought that it is very relevant for our conversation in performingborders.

There you presented a project that dealt with what seemed at the time a possibility to break with the austerity measures that were strangling a country and gave hope to the left in Europe: the Greek Referendum of 2015. Although the aftermath has been different than expected, you made sure that international artists would respond to this European historical moment with the project 'Love Letters to a (Post-Europe)' on 2nd and 3rd October 2015. Can you tell us a bit more about the structure of the project, the artists who participated and the generosity it involved?

**Lisa Alexander:** Love Letters to a (Post-)Europe at BIOS exploring urban culture framed a provocation that sought to invoke the agency of poetic gifting in response to a rapidly changing Europe. Artists were invited to respond with the action, idea or form of a love letter as a short work of up to fifteen minutes in length in any format they chose – to be presented live. Twenty-six artists, poets and performers created original work for the event including: Brian Catling, Robin Deacon, Tim Etchells, Brian Lobel, Claire MacDonald, Ivana Müller, Kira O'Reilly, Yoko Tawada. See: <http://bios.gr/events/1266/>

I had recently lived in Athens and witnessed the sense of betrayal and uncertainty that followed the overwhelming oxi to the stringent austerity measures for bailout set out by the Troika – the subject of Greece's referendum last year. In spite of the no-vote no clear outcome followed and the goal posts were moved again regarding bailout measures. The idea for the event stemmed from an urge to curate a process of coming together and collective witness in the context of Europe at that moment and particularly with reference to Greece. It enabled a platform for excessive



responses to the so-called crisis, at a time when the Troika was making excessive use of economic dogma as a means to manipulate regime change. I sent out the provocation in late July a couple of weeks after the referendum.

In the provocation I reference the encampments over five years ago; in public squares across Europe (and beyond) protesting against austerity as something that cannot be quantified by a global economic system and its 'technolinguistic automatisms'. A poetic witnessing performs a similar relationship to the moment, in time, in place, in body. Temporal, sensual, emotional, psychical qualities cannot be accounted for.

I was struck by something I had read by Franco "Bifo" Berardi regarding Europe's state of 'crisis' – that underneath the economic rationalizations was a deeper crisis – one that concerned the social imagination.<sup>74</sup> Something that I've been considering a lot in this last year in the contrasting context of the UK's referendum. Artistic practice on the other hand reserves a holding space for the imagination; that is singular, relational, embodied and unquantifiable. In a small way the event sought to step out of the existing structures of expressive control at the time through the agency of poetic witnessing.

All artists including myself gave their work and time to it. Box office proceeds were divided between the Athens-based charity Solidarity for All and the venue. Athens-based artists hosted visiting artists, who traveled of their own volition. This was integral to the whole ethos and artistic frame of the event – to do something not dictated to by economic agendas and as an act of generosity. It was a gesture. The action of coming together, of gifting a short work, of performing in person in Athens or nominating another to perform a text, an action or sending a video missive. A letter addresses another directly, a love letter invites intimacy, dispenses with formality, exceeds boundaries, engages a sensual encounter of the moment, is plural. A frame of witness that approaches another in the moment.

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<sup>74</sup> Berardi, F. B. (2012). *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*. Los Angeles, Semiotext(e).

**AC:** On Saturday 18th June the European Theatre Research Network, the Inside/Outside Europe Research Network, the Birkbeck Centre for Contemporary Theatre and the Camden People's Theatre presented 'Being European: Before the Referendum'. They meant the "Brexit" referendum, which asked British citizens whether they wanted for the UK to stay in the EU and that would happen 5 days later. At the time we were discussing possible scenarios, now we know the answer!

You have subsequently been invited to perform at the event 'After the Referendum' that took place on 17th September at the Camden People's Theatre. How did it feel as a UK artist that has been worked and lived in Greece for a long time to respond artistically to this international but deeply personal shock? With the piece you proposed in collaboration with Hari Marini, 'If/Then', you 'explore the terrain of the dilemma drawing on on-street vocal recordings of the general public in Athens, Glasgow and London'. What kind of response to "Brexit" emerged from this relation between cities, voices, and texts?

**LA:** *Then the message would read "Continue to wait"* (participant, Edinburgh)

I remember feeling referendum fatigue. The negative rhetoric and scaremongering surrounding both campaigns, the outright prejudice of the leave campaign. The question itself simplified something so complex that I was astounded that it could be asked in that way. If/Then sought to explore the absurdity of polar questions that frame complex issues in order to conceal a whole raft of considerations; giving voice to the unspoken ground between.

*Your wide face offers warmth. Your smile is laughter. Your laughter becomes mine...* (Lara Pawson)

Before the vote occurred Hari and I agreed that we wanted to open up a space for multiple voices and one of sharing amidst all the negativity.

If/Then also looked for inspiration and another way to express being through shared, appositional and dissonant narratives.

*...We drink tea. How many is OK I ask you. Which ones are OK. Are the ones in your street OK. Are the ones among my friends OK. Your hands are in your pockets...We have to be able to talk about it you say. We have to talk about health tourism...Your honesty is made of lead. My rage is patient... (Lara Pawson)*

I flew to Athens on the night of the 23rd June having submitted a postal vote. The lack of debate prior to framing a question of this magnitude in such general terms did not quell my shock of waking up to the result. A few days before I'd heard that my closest friend in Greece had a life-threatening illness. Everything fell into sharp relief. Greece feels like another home. There are people there I care very much about. Deep ties and involvement spanning the last seven years. Living there twice during this period also instilled in me a materially different sense of the social and the temporal and each time I returned to the UK I was shocked by the onward march of neoliberal agendas and their effects on social and civic engagement; explicit too on a local scale in my neighbourhood in London.

*I'm walking on Mount Lykabettus. A brisk ten minute walk up from where I live. I went up there to see the horizon. [Lisa]*

Hari and I had met at Love Letters to a (Post-)Europe the year before. Since then we had re-connected in London and exchanged ideas on living and making. There were many voices that made up the text we performed. In addition to the on-street encounters – we invited writers and artists to respond with short texts that explored dilemma. Hari and I wrote our own responses within that frame as two artists who have lived in each others' countries; the UK and Greece.

*Rushing in the heavy grey rain to catch my flight...The News. And then an explosion of emotions, of thoughts blended with tiredness. A few days after the storm...a British colleague asked me: 'Do you feel unwelcome?' I said: 'Sharing. I am still sharing things with people here'. (Hari Marini)*

*After a long discussion accompanied by ouzo and meze, I proposed to do a banner that reads 'British Refugees Welcome'. I write in the darkness of the night and all around me I see people performing an exodus without a promised land. (Myrto Tsilimpounidi)*

The on-street texts were generated by a short poetic game that sought to frame a simple, collective witnessing of moments occurring in different locales and social spaces. We did this on streets, squares and in other public spaces in Athens<sup>75</sup> and London. I also facilitated some encounters in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

*Then stories are truth/ If the birds were stars/ If this was all gone in 20 years (participants, Athens)*

These small gatherings were followed by a vocally-recorded group reading. A version of exquisite corpse between strangers on the street in a process of hospitality to the moment – writing the present through describing a future.

*But what if I could come inside as a stranger? What if I could come as I am, before any possible understanding of what that might mean? What if you could come as you are? What new forms of communion could that bring about? (João Florencio)*

"If/Then" sought to frame the witness of singular voices and perspectives during this time and facilitate the freedom to express personal, playful and public dilemmas. It was not a direct response to the Brexit, rather an attempt to open up a space away from polarities and one that explored and imagined a social space that felt shutdown. It drew on examples from myth, philosophy and literature also. Responses between street, stage and page sought to illustrate the multiplicity and validity of singular points of view – expanding the slippage between yes and no.

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<sup>75</sup> In Athens these encounters were part of another work "Multilogue" excerpts of which were broadcast on Beton7 radio; part of "Performance Biennale: No Future" and Beton7's "V\_Ideas, Performances 2016".

*What kind of space can I open up for her here? But we're not quite there yet and I hope we don't arrive. How vital is this in between space. (Lisa)*

*Then no more words just music (participant, London)*

**AC: In responding to the two referenda in Greece and the UK, you have been asking for collective responses in a way that seems aimed at building a 'common' space for discussion and sharing. In our conversation you referred to what Claire Bishop named 'delegated performance' while in the text of 'If/Then' the word 'change' is often repeated. Is art a means for proposing new social paradigms?**

**LA:** Perhaps it would be more accurate if I described a form of 'delegated writing' and witness. Bishop<sup>76</sup> refers to the social turn in contemporary art (since the 1990s) in which artists have increasingly delegated performance by hiring 'non-professionals' to perform themselves. A process that frames the socio-economic categorization of a person and the ethics of labour so that is witnessed (often uncomfortably) by the audience. I am employing delegation as a way in which to explore the validity, multiplicity and relational process of singular witness. The 'performer' speaks or writes his/herself in relation to another – as a mode of gathering and provoking the experience and expression of that witness. The 'performer' is no longer the object but part of a process of witnessing the self as other and delving into the subjectivity of witness.

What is interesting about facilitating a form of delegated witness is that it engages in prefigurative practice and with that potentially recuperates at least a momentary social imaginary. Bojana Cvejić and Ana Vujanović discuss a crisis of the social imaginary as something that we are unaware of losing since its disappearance from public debate, in a climate of financially-linked presentism and the historical failure of 20th century social democracies. Amongst the potential for emergent social horizons such as self-organised movements addressing a lack of public services in for

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<sup>76</sup> Bishop, C. (2012). "Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity." *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London, Verso: 219-240.

example Athens, they also cite art as

“a perfect place for imagining the social...every single work or project has a potential to project one possible world. We need not expect these worlds to be large, complete...they probably cannot change society...but they can still hack the virtual world of our society rather than ‘leaving it alone’ in its actuality”.<sup>77</sup>

The urge to share and frame collective or multiple modes of response in recent works is informed by an increasing colonization of our civic and social space – even of the imagination – by neoliberal and global economic process. Artistic practice engaging in modes of ‘being-with and for’ might be a catalyst for exploring another social paradigm through the ways in which it prefigures the operation of agency, gives voice to the self as other and shifts processes and construction of witnessing.

**AC: A lot is going on at the moment for you, many projects are developing from the previous ones and many new ones are taking shape. Can you give us a hint of what comes next for Lisa Alexander?**

**LA:** There are a number interlinking strands of work that I am currently pursuing and I hope to be able to confirm or add details to this blog in the new year. And to continue exploring processes of sharing and of opening up the space in between. This year has been a challenging one for many of us and the need for fellowship and imagination feels vital.

I am currently pursuing a book version of Love Letters to a (Post-)Europe that will transcribe and re-perform the event for page as a collection of letters: performance, poetry and visual scores, an essay and a series of postscripts. Full video documentation of the event will be completed shortly and the DVD lodged at LADA in early 2017. This will be made available online soon after.

I have also been helping Claire MacDonald plan/curate a short residency in Greece exploring migrancy, marks of occupation and practice in the frame of Walking Women (April 2017).

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<sup>77</sup> Cvejić, B. and Vujanović, A. (2016) “The Crisis of the Social Imaginary and Beyond.” (paper): <https://www.academia.edu/26017681/> p.5

Lastly I am looking into setting up a relay network and event series that explores ways of linking social and cultural contexts in Europe (and beyond) translocally through engaging concepts and practices of gifting, different cultural understandings of hosting and hospitality, and notions of passage with reference to freedom, agency and safety.

***Lisa Alexander's** artwork and research explores the subjectivity of witnessing and artistic practice as a lens on social change. She has presented in the UK and internationally. Recent projects explored processes of coming together, poetic agency and shared narrativity. She curated Love Letters to a (Post-)Europe at BIOS, Athens as an artistic response to the situation following the Greek referendum in 2015 and is planning a book that re-frames the event for page. She created/performed If/Then commissioned by European Theatre Research Network, Inside/Outside Europe Research Network and Birkbeck Centre for Contemporary Theatre and Multilogue; in collaboration with Hari Marini and the voices and words of many in the period prior to and following the EU referendum in the UK. Lisa holds a PhD from Roehampton (2014).*

**To know more about Lisa Alexander's practice:**

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIW=Digital link/Website; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

Additional resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
DIC	'Crisis' in Excess: Performing Europe Today' - Winchester University, 2016	Organised by Inside/Outside Europe Research Network	<a href="http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2016/04/crisis-in-excess-performing-europe-today/">http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2016/04/crisis-in-excess-performing-europe-today/</a>
DIW	Love Letters to a (Post-)Europe	Lisa Alexander	<a href="http://bios.gr/events/1266/">http://bios.gr/events/1266/</a>

**Alessandra Cianetti:** Michaela, you are the founder and co-director of Culture+Conflict, 'a not-for-profit agency focusing on art produced in, or in response to, conflict and post-conflict situations across the world'. What are the conflicts and art practices you have been focusing on lately? As curator, academic and director, how do you think the notion of border has been changing in our contemporary world?

**Michaela Crimmin:** International conflict itself, and especially now, has no borders. Try and pinpoint a beginning or end to a particular conflict present or past, and you soon are thrown across time and space. Allegiances shift as much now as they did in the World Wars. In acknowledgement of these realities and in the interest of neither corralling artists nor simplifying the subject of war, Conflict+Culture has preferred to intersect with places, themes, and questions that address the subject of conflict from many points of entry. Our first event, at the Free Word Centre in central London, took Baghdad's Al-Mutanabbi Street as its context, a booksellers' market that had been hit by a car bomb some four years before our event. This attempt at destroying a shared intellectual space had inspired a play, music, and responses from visual artists and these were represented during the course of the evening. Since then we have variously addressed other geographical locations, examined subjects such as the use of satire in addressing war, and taken the debate to a variety of venues including Amnesty International, the Imperial War Museum, the South Bank Centre, and the House of Lords, as well as to arts organisations including the ICA (the Institute of Contemporary Arts) and Delfina Foundation. At Delfina Omar Kholeif, who we had invited to chair a panel discussion, framed the debate by asking whether art's independence was not increasingly being subsumed by politics. In his briefing note to the panel members he wrote "I hope that this session will form/create a discursive discussion for us to share and exchange ideas about the way that contemporary culture is presented, mediated, distanced, nurtured, annihilated, re-articulated, appropriated, dissolved and constructed". While the event at Delfina was concerned specifically with Egypt, Omar's brief continues to be an apt



lodestar for events that followed where the debate has centred on countries including Palestine, Northern Ireland and Iraq, countries where the UK has been directly involved in the drawing of borders and the conflicts that have and are taking place.

There are obvious reasons to question this strategy, including working with artists from a range of different heritages with different methodologies and interests. For the time being we are nevertheless comfortable with the fact that experiences, questions, and challenges that occur under the broad heading of 'conflict' provide an easily shared basis for sustained and we hope incremental exchange and debate.

In the second part of your question you ask whether I see a change in the notion of border. To begin with borders are a shared reality. The writer Frances Stonor Saunders wrote a fascinating article for the London Review of Books in March of last year<sup>78</sup> (the prompt for us to invite her to speak at our recent series of 'Promised Land' events). In this she references Günter Grass's Oskar from the *The Tin Drum* and writes "there is only one way into this life, and one way out of it. Everything that happens in between – all the thresholds we cross and recross, all the 'decisions and revisions that a minute will reverse' – is bordered by this unbiddable truth. What we hope for is safe passage between these two fixed boundaries, to be able to make something of the experience of being alive before we are required to stop being alive. There's no negotiating birth or death. What we have is the journey." It goes without saying that some people's journeys, involving crossing many borders of various kinds, are a hell of a lot easier than others. However now in the UK we are being jolted into a prospect of not being able to travel quite so freely across certain countries' borders that we have probably taken for granted all our lives. Having been fed the heady concept of 'globalisation' – given the money, the 'right' passport and ownership of the right technology – and having been accustomed to an unprecedented ease of communication, we in the West are perhaps waking up. There is a shuddering realisation that cyber walls are more porous than we had presumed; that drones might rather easily dodge a scrambled

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<sup>78</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders, *Where on Earth are you?*, London Review of Books, Vol. 38 No. 5, 03.013.2016, pp 7-12.

military aircraft; to say nothing of the nuclear threat that we have somehow buried at the back of our minds since the end of the Cold War. We know from Chernobyl that nuclear fallout is impossible to contain within a particular region. Horrifying also are the binaries between belief systems and cultures that have resurfaced over recent years, creating divisions that can seem as impenetrable as the border controls, wire, bricks and cement between countries.

As a child I loved crossing country borders, adding another stamp to my passport, the palpable excitement of stepping into a new territory, going forwards. I have now come to loathe them – real borders, borders between religions, and borders between ethnicities – they are hateful things. Every time a border has been drawn or redrawn, there have been devastating consequences. But as a curator addressing conflict, borders are inevitably a subject to come back to time and again, a fascinating subject and one that we cannot, should not, ignore.

**AC: In the last two months you have been co-curating with the Goethe-Institut London ‘Promised Land’: two events addressing the notions of Europe and the clash between its vision as a project of freedom and the reality of Fortress Europe. You have been inviting amazing speakers between academia and the art world and I would like to ask you two questions, one for each of the two events.**

**\* AC: During the first event ‘Promised Land: panel discussion’ last October you invited artists Hrair Sarkissian and Jonas Staal; writer Frances Stonor Saunders and academic Dr. Bernadette Buckley. What do you think were the main reflections drawn at this event that are important to share with us?**

**MC:** Frances Stonor Saunders, following on from her article in the LRB, began by asking “why, in our much-hyped globalised world, (is) the rhetoric of the Promised Land so mercilessly unequal to the reality?” She went on to say “I’m trying to comprehend the world as a question, I’m not sure of any other way”. I could not conceivably do justice to her talk, nor to those of the other speakers, but happily in this case there will be a recording on the ICA

website later this year, and a fuller account published of Frances' talk. Her final question was perhaps the most devastating: "what if heaven and hell are not separate destinations?" Being given a difficult question to ponder I find more interesting than listening to any number of answers. One of the joys of art is that artists and writers of merit spare us all a reductive solution, or dogma of any sort, and instead present new perspectives for an engaged audience to consider.

At the event at the ICA, Jonas Staal introduced his fearless programme of work where he is testing the concept of 'union' alongside an acceptance of difference, be this in Rojava or the Netherlands. A reflection here was on how courageous artists can be and how far from the myth of the artist in a secluded studio. How art and politics are inseparable. Then there was Hrair Sarkissian's moving study of belonging, and of not belonging, and of searching for identity. This was hugely moving, his images working in parallel to his words, and a reminder that art is privileged in its freedom to legitimately bring a personal account to address the political. Finally I am trying to extract Bernadette Buckley's deep consideration of the relationship between art and politics from her so we can share this more widely.

Tania Bruguera in a recent talk for BBC Radio 4<sup>79</sup> ended by saying 'What can we do? How can we organise? If you remain complacent and passive, you are part of the problem.'

- **AC: On 3rd December you hosted at Central Saint Martins "Promised Land: one-day symposium" with an incredible range of key speakers, artists and academics. Please tell us a bit about the day and the discussions it arises.**

**MC:** The Goethe-Institut London invited us to consider Europe with its post-WW2 vision of unity, security and aspiration, and in its present day reality. The reemergence of nationalism in its most unpleasant form, division, the displacement of people, the tightening of borders, the inequality between the wealthy and what the press and the politicians call the rest of us, the 'ordinary people'. Obviously an enormous subject area and as with the ICA event, one that was never going to make for a neat and tidy account, and

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<sup>79</sup> Tania Bruguera, Imagining the New Truth, BBC Radio 4, 05.01.2017.

quite possibly a miserable occasion considering the events of 2016 and the challenges ahead. Looking at the photographs taken throughout the day by a young artist, Nikola Zelmanovic (a number of which illustrate this piece), confirms my memory that there was actually an extraordinary amount of smiling and laughter. Not least in response to Nina Katchadourian's *Accent Elimination*, readily available on her website, and a brilliantly humorous look at cultural stereotypes. Alongside humour, was a display of consummate energy by each of the speakers – artists and curators from Nigeria, from Palestine, Germany, Denmark, Austria as well as the UK rammed the event with every approach imaginable, some very directly talking about borders. We invited a young writer currently studying at the Royal College of Art, Alexandra Quicho, to summarise the day, as attached at the end of this interview.

**AC: During “Promised Land: one-day symposium” artist Emeka Okereke stated that we cannot speak of Europe without talking about its history of colonialism in response to the idea of a European Republic presented by keynote speaker Ulrike Guérot. What do you think this implies in looking at art and conflicts in contemporary Europe?**

**MC:** Ulrike Guérot's proposal for a new European Republic sought to respond to the inequalities of past borders and exclusive nation states by re-imagining multi-cultural populations living in new cities and regions with more devolved local governance. Emeka was right, as was a member of the audience, to bring Colonialism directly into the conversation. How can we conceivably talk about the present or the future without looking at cause, and as such Colonialism simply must not be side lined, nor the historical clashes between religions and nations that feed so directly into the present. Ulrike agreed but at that point unfortunately had to leave for an appointment. She subsequently sent the title of an article she had co-written that she said she would have referenced had there been more time (a link to this below).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ulrike Guerot and Robert Menasse, *Europe and the Reconstruction of the Free World*, [Green European Journal](#).

**AC: As you know this blog focuses on Live Art, although with your work we are digressing into how wider art practices are able to tackle broader issues linked to conflicts. I wonder whether in your projects you have been collaborating with Live Artists and in what way you think Live Art can contribute to the aim of your work.**

**MC:** There are so many artists that we reference, that we enormously respect, artists who can be working in extremely dangerous contexts, many of whom you might categorise under a label of 'Live Art'. For example Tania Bruguera who works prominently in the public sphere in Cuba but who has been detained on a number occasions by the police. There is Regina José Galindo from Guatemala, Iraqi American artist Wafaa Bilal, and Rabih Mroué from Lebanon. Brilliant artists. Live Art is of course sometimes the only medium an artist can use because otherwise they and their audiences are too vulnerable. Natalia Kaliada, co-founder of the Belarus Free Theatre, spoke at one of Culture+Conflict events and who has more recently been working with Pussy Riot's Masha Alyokhina ("If you don't run in front of the train, then you're nowhere"). There are artists such as Jelili Atiju in Nigeria, who bring their concerns for human rights and justice into the streets, who encourage participation. This direct engagement with people, in a particular moment of time, has a different and a complementary power and potency to the art that is seen in a gallery.

Finally I must say how much I admire the important work undertaken by the Live Art Development Agency over such a sustained period, and with consummate generosity.

**AC: Unfortunately conflicts do not seem to end and the year that has just ended has been quite challenging in that respect. Do you have plans to address this in 2017?**

**MC:** We will most definitely continue to address the relationship between art and conflict not only this year but long after. We have initiated two research residencies at King's College London in the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historical Collection. This is a partnership with their amazing archivists Geoffrey

Browell and Catherine Sambrook. Palestinian artist Bisan Abu Eishah has just started exploring the extensive material held, and we will be in conversation at the Mosaic Rooms on Tuesday 22 February to discuss his observations. Jananne Al-Ani, born in Iraq, will also be hosted at King's and we greatly look forward to their insights from their different cultural perspectives.

We premiered a new work by Danish artist Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen titled Quicksand, commissioned by the Goethe-Institut London in partnership with Culture+Conflict, which is a sound installation on the subject of reverse migration – Westerners leaving a future UK by the same routes as refugees are using to come to Europe at the moment. The work is being further developed with a visual element and will be shown in an exhibition as part of the Hull UK City of Culture activities this spring. Orna Kazimi, an artist from Afghanistan, continues an MA in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins, made possible by funds raised by Culture+Conflict. Plans are in development featuring research, further events, an exhibition and book.

We are especially keen to instigate more conversation between panel and audience and will make this a priority. Equally we would very much like to hear from readers of performingborders who would like us to publicise events and projects, artworks, and activities; and to hearing your views; or who would simply like to be added to our mailing list.

Meanwhile, very best wishes for 2017 to everyone!

**Michaela Crimmin** is co-director of Culture+Conflict, a not-for-profit agency working to investigate and amplify the role and value of contemporary art produced in response to international conflict. Activities include research, discursive events, commissions, scholarships and a forthcoming artist's residency at the conflict related archives at King's College London. She is an independent curator; teaches on the Royal College of Art's Curating Contemporary Art MA programme; and is an associate lecturer at Central Saint Martins School of Art. Previously Head of Arts at the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), a role that included initiating and directing the RSA Arts & Ecology Centre; and the 'Fourth Plinth' commissioned artworks, Trafalgar

*Square, London.*

**Summary of the Promised Land symposium at Central Saint Martins,  
3rd December 2016**

PROMISED LAND, through a series of events, screenings and a commission, is addressing current shifts within European politics, raising debate about the challenges, responsibilities and consequences these present.

In the years immediately following World War II, political union was seen as an antidote to the extreme nationalism that had fuelled the conflict. An integrated Europe promised open markets, freedom of movement, and justice upheld by the European Court. The vision is being threatened by the rise of nationalist movements, the tightening of borders, the proliferation of refugee camps and the displacement of people fleeing conflict, extreme poverty and ecological disaster. Distrust and fear are mounting.

What are the ramifications for art and artists? What insights and ideas are artists bringing? How can we move forward at a time of extreme uncertainty?

'Promised Land' began with a screening of Christoph Schlingensiefel's *Foreigners Out!*, a work from 2002 which documented the response to Schlingensiefel's shocking installation of a refugee compound outside the Vienna Opera House based on the Big Brother television series. The ensuing public outrage and media fracas served Schlingensiefel's goal to reveal the dangerous rhetorical strategies of the Austrian nationalist party.

Seeing the root of Europe's problems in nationalist thinking, in her keynote Professor Ulrike Guérot spoke in favour of establishing an inclusive, de-territorialised European Republic. Europe can only be fixed, she stipulated, by abolishing the current nation-state paradigm. Disregarding regional nuances including the urban-rural income divide, the EU pits countries against each other based on economic performance. To truly succeed, Europe can no longer be tethered to its market, nor to the political needs of

its individual states. Instead, Guérot proposes that sovereignty be returned to its citizens through the creation of a true republic: a political system which allows for equal social, financial, and legal representation, featuring a House of Representatives elected by individuals.

Emeka Okereke, founder of Invisible Borders and the first artist to speak, levelled a critique against the idea of Europe as a bastion of human rights, instead linking the migrant crisis to the “imposed cartographies of colonialism.” Free movement is the key to fundamental rights, Okereke asserted; “without movement, there can be no exchange.” Reflecting on tense or serendipitous encounters from Cameroon to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Okereke considered “how to become, via your presence, an object of useful agitation.”

“We find ourselves at a time where goods, information, and images can move very fast, but it’s becoming increasingly difficult for most people to travel and cross borders” noted the artist Tobias Zielony, whose work at the Venice Biennial 2015 depicted migrant activists in Germany. Documenting their marches, protests, and downtime alike, Zielony revealed the diversity of interests that brought migrant groups to Europe — whether they were fleeing homosexual discrimination (punishable by death) in Uganda, or threats to their lives due to political agitation in Sudan.

If Zielony’s photographs aimed to turn the journalistic image of ‘refugees as passive victims’ inside out, Nikolaj Bendix Skykum Larsen’s audio work, commissioned for *Promised Land* by the Goethe-Institut London and Culture+Conflict, sought to explore refugees’ victimhood more deeply, fictionalising a Western European man’s fraught escape from his country. “I wanted it to be a really unpleasant experience,” said Larsen; by “placing the listener in a horrible situation together with [his] protagonist,” he hoped to invoke Western empathies towards the physical and psychological traumas of those undertaking dangerous journeys by sea.

“In Europe’s Lampedusa(s), there is the projection of an invasion of the European Union that is simply not taking place”, asserted Dr. Giacomo Orsini in his lecture, *Promised Land for whom?* In his research, he found



that 80-90% of those making an unauthorised border crossing into Europe are asylum seekers with a legal right to enter, while the vast majority of people living irregularly in the European Union entered with a regular visa and subsequently overstayed it. “It’s an appealing discourse,” he continued. “The obsession with an imagined invasion misrepresents what actually happens at the border, while there’s scarce interest for empirical data. The EU only hosts 6% of the world’s refugees — and the idea of Europe as a promised land where everyone aspires to come indicates a new Eurocentrism.”

In her lecture on The Art of Migration, Nanna Heidenreich rooted today’s critical migration thinking in the globalisation discourse of the 1990s. “Today’s crisis is not one of migration but of the European project,” said Heidenreich, pointing out that large-scale movements of people across the globe have occurred across history. Migration, she urged, ought not to be considered marginal; instead, it ought to be seen as a movement at the very centre of society.

Heidenreich critiqued the connection between art and activism, seeing the two as deeply interconnected yet ultimately unwilling to negotiate on each other’s terms. Yet the three artists following demonstrated a sensitivity often missed in political discourse about immigration and the right to live where one wishes. Accent Elimination, a three-channel video by Nina Kachadourian, saw the artist and her parents read through a script about the Kachadourians’ origins first in their own accents, and then in each other’s, working with an “accent coach”. With humour it showed the differences in how speech is constructed across cultures (the individuated words of Armenian, versus the American’s near-slurred flow), and how simply by changing an accent stereotypes are undermined.

Artist Bisan Abu Eiseh spoke about his participation in a project in southern Italy, highlighting not only success but the importance of analysing failure — the lack of time and the sudden use of English language, which the participants did not speak, leading to a confusion between the artistic dimensions of the project and the difficult reality. To conclude the day, Phoebe Boswell delivered a narrative about her time at a residency in

Gothenburg. “There’s this thing about drawing which allows you to ‘physicalise’ empathy,” she said, clicking through images she had drawn of daily life in this highly segregated Swedish city. In doing so, she described the many minute feelings of affinity and of isolation, referencing James Baldwin’s *Stranger in the Village* to describe differing registers of alienation — what it means to feel welcomed, versus an outsider, and how those distinctions are often blurred.

“When home can’t be a physical place, it becomes people, your actions, your activities. That can exist anywhere,” she continued. “Through my work, I find ways to go ‘home’. That ‘home’ is definitely not a place, but a feeling of understanding something better.”

Alexandra Quicho, 2016

### To know more about Michaela Crimmin’s work:

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIW=Digital link/Website; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

Additional resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
Art	<b>Summary of the Promised Land Symposium, Central Saint Martins, 03 December, 2016</b>	Alexandra Quicho	Text reported above
DIW	Culture+Conflict	Michaela Crimmin	<a href="http://www.cultureandconflict.org.uk/">http://www.cultureandconflict.org.uk/</a>
DF	Art and Conflict, 2016	Culture+Conflict	<a href="http://www.cultureandconflict.org.uk/news/art-and-conflict-new-publication/">http://www.cultureandconflict.org.uk/news/art-and-conflict-new-publication/</a>

**Alessandra Cianetti: The waiting room at Ventimiglia train station. Migrants. Passengers. Hopes. Fears. Lucia, you have started this year with the moving collective action 'Don't stop the beauty' at the border between Italy and France. Why that border? Who and what did the action involve?**

**Lucia Palmero:** I was born and grew up in Ventimiglia, Italy, a town on the border with France where for years I have witnessed severe episodes of racism towards migrants who attempt to cross the border. I have known this border for years and it rips lives apart. For me it was fundamental to start from here.

The performance 'Don't stop the Beauty' was held at the station of Ventimiglia and in particular around the waiting room, the crucial point of the action. In this specific place, the Italian police gathers migrants arriving by train from other Italian cities and after a brief interview with each one, those who have not applied for asylum in Italy are deported towards Centres for Identification and Expulsion. It is to Ventimiglia that France sends all the migrant minors back by train, carrying out a serious violation of the rights of these young people who, instead of being protected, are exposed to the criminal networks of smugglers.

The intention of the performance was to transform the station and in particular the waiting room, which is basically the border, or rather the place of filtering, into an amplifier.

I asked individual singers and choirs from different origins living in this area (coming from Camerun, Guinea Conakry, France, the Philippines and Italy) to choose a traditional song of their own country or another song that they would like to sing in front of the border. Each group chose one and the outcome was a mix of traditional/popular songs and two original songs composed just for this occasion. It became a dialogue between ancient and contemporary voices that gave shape to a genuine moment of togetherness despite the difficult context.

The idea was to show the beauty of our different heritages through a popular and common way of expression, music, but also to highlight the existing element of rupture, the border. This is why white singers performed by moving in the entire space of the station while black singers performed inside the waiting room.

The initial enjoyable moment for the public changed into something much more intense as the presence of a filter between the black singers in the waiting room and the audience on the platform materialized through a closed door. Therefore I really enjoyed the attempt of a spectator to force the door of the waiting room open and then seeing many people finally entering the waiting room (from a secondary entrance). At the end of the action, the public asked the singers to continue to play their songs as they danced together.

**AC: As an artist you blend practice and activism, as you also work in a refugee camp. Lately you have been quite vocal in supporting the French farmer and activist Cedric Herrou. How do you transpose your activist activities into your artistic practice?**

**LP:** At no time had I planned to merge the two things, everything came about naturally by itself, as far as I'm concerned. I felt I had to respond to a social need, there was the desire of many people to show solidarity and support for migrants stranded at the border. I tried to answer chorally, through unconventional practices, starting from empathy and guided by the common desire to want to be present for someone else.

**AC: Most of your public actions are a collective effort in order to engage people of every background in changing the local culture surrounding migration. In what ways have you been involving local residents, migrants and activists? Why do you think it is important to do so through art?**

**LP:** In my town there are many immigrants or children of immigrants who in the 50s moved here from southern Italy and they encountered strong

discrimination by local people (the Ligurians). My mother was one of them, she suffered then like many others who perhaps today, given their personal experience, show understanding towards these people who are arriving.

A year ago in Ventimiglia I created a committee of associations called Article 2 Committee, inspired by the second article of the Italian Constitution [The article reads: "The Republic recognises and guarantees the inviolable rights of the person, both as an individual and in the social groups where human personality is expressed. The Republic expects that the fundamental duties of political, economic and social solidarity be fulfilled."]  
Article 2 Committee operates in support of transiting migrants.

I just collected the desire of many people including asylum seekers, to do something useful together... it also served as a pretext to create an informal meeting point between migrants and the townspeople. At the same time, I used art as a convector to translate all the voices and needs of the committee into artistic works and actions.

Art needs to embrace people, to get out of the museums, to merge with reality especially now that we find it hard to imagine that an improvement in the current state of events is possible. It is like a language, if it speaks from the heart we understand it and we all speak it, it is not something for a few, a niche, it is universal.

**AC: During our conversation last year, you mentioned that you started performing as a main medium two years ago. What made you transition toward this practice? What do you think Live Art adds to your work around notions of migration, solidarity and change?**

**LP:** first of all painting has always accompanied me since I can remember and growing up in certain situations, I experienced it as an authentic and genuine need. Years ago when I was still working in an office, I took time out at night and in the weekend to stay awake and paint. Living in such a difficult context such as the border of Ventimiglia, painting was a release. It could not however be anything more, it remained a void, an underlying dissatisfaction that even I personally did not know how to fill. Every day I witnessed racism in police controls on trains, in my mind I could hear my

mother's voice when she used to tell me how the Ligurians treated her just because she was an immigrant from Calabria. I myself, was an economic migrant commuter to France. The French call us "rital", a nickname which means Italian refugees. But on that train I had the 'right' skin colour, the 'right' piece of paper in my pocket and I didn't do anything to deserve this luck. The turning point was when I became aware of the work of Michelangelo Pistoletto and in particular that of Tania Bruguera. They opened my eyes. I understood that reality itself is the material to be moulded and 'artivism', as understood by Tania Bruguera, was the way forward.

Whatever we are doing now, we are weaving the future reality. It is from this point that the awareness has grown that our imagination, our feelings, and our body, are the most effective and most authentic instruments to shape and transform reality and our own life into a beautiful piece of work.

Another thing that has marked a step towards Live Art was an episode that I experienced. One evening I was invited to attend a dinner in the dark organised by an association of blind people in Sanremo, to raise money but also to allow people to experience for a short time what it means to not be able to see. To live that situation has opened up a world for me. I realised that through the body and having a direct experience of something you do not know, if only for a brief moment, that experience becomes part of your emotional baggage. It triggers something empathic that leaves its mark. From there I thought that I could create and make experiences come to life. A year later I quit my job to devote myself completely to art and human rights. I started attending a reception centre for asylum seekers in Ventimiglia and as a result of the number of shipwrecks in the Mediterranean, I started to organise public commemoration moments, flash mobs. They were brief moments in memory of those who hadn't made it and those who were en route to a better life, at the same time it was a pretext to bring together migrants with that part of the townspeople who cared about showing solidarity. We formed a circle on the seafront and a trumpeter played a version of 'il Silenzio', a piece that is played in Italy just before a short period of particular contemplation in silence. After five minutes of reflection, the moment was over. But what happened at the end of the action was that the migrants and the citizens started talking and

getting acquainted with each other and from this I realised that simply being there was important, it left a mark.

In June 2015, more than two hundred migrants marched to the border and occupied the border cliff asking France to let them in. After two days, volunteers, activists, passers-by showed their solidarity with these people, bringing them all kinds of necessities from food to tents for sleeping. Some people even started living together with them. The majority of the migrants, despite the fatigue, observed fasting during the day as it was the period of Ramadan and in the evening an imam came from Nice, France to direct the prayers. It was 20th June 2015, World Refugee Day.

I decided to create a collective moment of unity and humanity to annihilate and hold up to ridicule the border we had in front of us. We formed a circle that gathered together Refugees, Italian and French citizens, Atheists, Muslims, Christians, passers-by, anyone who wanted to participate and share a moment of silence dedicated to all refugees in the world and in particular to people stranded at frontiers. All this at the border and with the police staring at us. This human circle gave such an emotional charge to everyone, that even though it was Ramadan and an extremely exhausting and critical situation, people started singing and dancing together.

Here is the link to the video of that special moment:  
<https://youtu.be/uvC4J2MNozY>

In the same place, a year later, I organised another human chain including Italian and French activists of Amnesty International and Italian and French citizens. Unfortunately episodes of violence by the police against migrants at the border, made it more prudent not to invite them to participate.

Painting is confined to two-dimensions and sculpture to three-dimensions. As the term “Live Art” says, it is a form of Art that is alive, that shapes reality and gives the opportunity of merging with it.

Although most of my performances are conceived as collective, I have also presented solo pieces such as ‘ Human Nature’. This performance is a way

to transpose onto my body the experience of not being able to move where I want, which started from a study inspired by the realms of living creatures. The investigation focuses on the difference between the scientific definition of vegetable and animal realms. It emerged that the main point that highlights the difference between these two worlds is the ability of movement. Right on the border between these two realms, man has been creating a third new space where its freedom of movement is self-limited.

During the action I stood with my feet planted in the soil, bonded by a rope to a grate and holding a living snail in my hand. I started taking awareness of my body, by slowly moving my hands and arms then moving my feet and legs. I continued to move taking awareness of the space gradually increasing the rhythm of my movements until I reached the point where the rope totally unfolded.

There started the fight between my will to move away and the rope forcing me to stay in a delimited space. I started to run from where the action began towards the public although the rope kept on tugging me down. I continued to do this until, exhausted, I set the snail free on the ground as a symbolic ritual of separation from the animal realm. I remained there, occupying a limbo space, watching the snail slowly move away while drawing a trace of its passage.

**AC: You also added that performingborders research-blog interested you because of the possibility of connecting and knowing more about other Live Artists' work on the same issues and that it gave you hope. Do you feel isolated as an artist working in Italy around issues that have been quite divisive for many years? How do you connect with your transalpine collaborators? Do you think artists need platform like performingborders to create an international network of conversations and possible collaborations?**

**LP:** In fact I do feel quite isolated, maybe because of the fact that I live in a region that doesn't offer a lot artistically and in a country that still finds it difficult to take into consideration the work of someone "over 35" not represented by a gallery yet and not really inside the "art system". What I



find of great interest in this moment is to know that I am not alone in doing what I do, getting to know the work of other artists, expanding my views on this topic, deepening my research and bringing my exploration to a broader level. I am starting a collaboration with a group of refugee artists in Paris with whom I hope to develop a project in Calais this year. I am absolutely convinced that artists need to know and to connect with each other, to me it's a breath of pure oxygen. I got to know the amazing work of artists I didn't know to be honest and I would love to have the opportunity to develop something together.

**AC: For you this year has already started as a committed, courageous one. What are you preparing for the coming months?**

**LP:** There are some things in the pipeline and I would like to carry them out well.

By the end of February I will attend a workshop in Pistoia led by anthropologist Enrique Vargas of the Barcelona-based "Teatro de los sentidos" focusing on the theme of the labyrinth. For me it will be a research for deepening a language and a poetic, that of the senses, whose foundations belong to all human beings. On 26th March I will be performing at the Eco Village of Torri Superiore during the "Spring Festival" that this year is on the topic of the Labyrinth as well. On that occasion, I will be giving shape to an individual sensorial experience which will be tailor made for every single person who metaphorically will become the traveller in their own labyrinth.

From 5th to 12th March I have been invited by the Councillor of Culture of the City of San Biagio to host a retrospective on my works from last year, which include not only performances but also some paintings. In the space called "U BASTU" I will expose my paintings of my "Landscapes" series on which for the opening I will let live snails move and live their marks, while there will be a lecture of some extracts of Francesco Biamonti's book "Vento largo".

This writer was born in San Biagio and in that book he tells the story of a

smuggler who helped some people to reach France by secret mountain paths of the area where I live.

It will be a dialogue between our imaginaries on the topic of frontiers and of going beyond frontiers, therefore I feel privileged to have the chance to give tribute to this writer I love.

In April, again at the space “U BASTU” of San Biagio, I will make a performance called “Un the con te” which means “A tea with you”. I will invite the public to sit at a table with another person for 15 minutes and enjoy a tea together while knowing each other, then change table and spend other 15 minutes with someone else and so on. I will invite some refugees and asylum seekers to join the event in an attempt to create a moment of mutual understanding.

Apart from this, I am working on a project to turn my experience at the listening and orientation service of the Refugees camp into an artistic experience to be lived by other people. A rather more ambitious project that I am setting up with the artists in Paris I mentioned earlier is a broad collective action in Calais. I am counting on spending time on the scene to listen to the various voices of those who live there and then work on and define a project of a choral performance.

Then, there are a couple of dreams I have hidden away for some time ...One day I hope to have the opportunity to learn from two artists that I admire in particular, perhaps with a residency or a workshop; William Pope L. to explore the similarities that bind racism in Europe and in the United States; and Tania Bruguera for her courage and for what she has meant to me. There's still a lot to learn and a lot to do.

**Lucia Palmero.** *Resident of a border town, existentialist at heart, artist and activist. Deeply involved in the topic of migration from her origins to the point of actively participating in the tragedy of the migrants in Europe, Lucia investigates the concepts of border vs individual/collective identity through performances, flash mobs, paintings and videos cancelling out the*

*boundaries of her field of research.*

**To know more about Lucia Palmero's practice:**

*Pbl = Publication; Art= Article; DF= Digital File; DIW=Digital link/Website; DIC=Digital link/Conference; DfC=Digital file/Catalogue; DIA= Digital link/Article-interview*

Additional resources			
Type	Title	Author	Reference
DIW	Artist's website	Lucia Palmero	<a href="http://www.luciapalmero.com/">http://www.luciapalmero.com/</a>

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*Cover Image: 'Human Chain 2016'. Photograph by Lucia Palmero*

*Image 2 (p.92): Yoko Tawada at "Love Letters to a (Post-)Europe" (2015) curated by Lisa Alexander at BIOS, Athens. Image: Efythia Vlachou.*