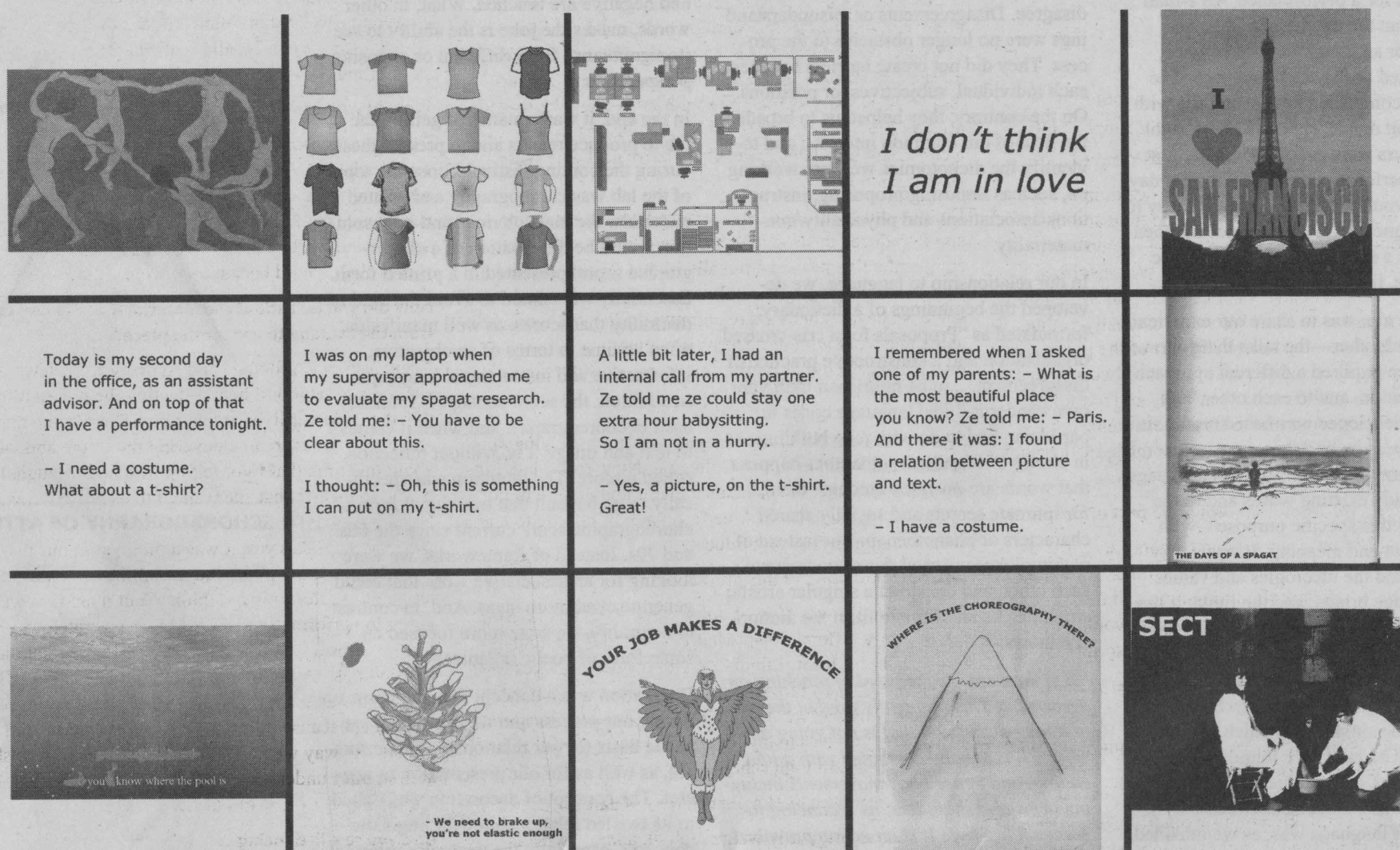


The Choreography of Attention



Carla Peterson (Artistic Director of New York Live Arts) and Moriah Evans (MRPJ Managing Editor) traveled to Belgrade, Serbia this past Fall in order to attend the Kondenz Festival on behalf of The Suitcase Fund. During the course of this festival, a group of eight European artists from various artistic backgrounds, curators and theorists were invited to come together to examine strategies for choreographing attention. Below is a description of this group's experience collectively working on this topic--the choreography of attention.

Writing from the viewpoint of our common experience, we want to focus on and deepen some crucial mechanisms of our artistic work, mechanisms that we essentially discovered together through the work itself. This article is, in other words, an analysis of a shared working process and thus from a so called straightforward or objective perspective. Ironically, it has echoes of the quasi-objective approach with which we began our process, but which we fortunately decided to abandon. We had become stuck in a situation that was a mere guessing game. It was a turning point for us and we decided instead to create and experience the common.

We were nine persons invited by the performance organization Station in Belgrade, at the end of October last year, to take part in a working experience, co-organized by the performance organization itself, and the European network Special Issue. It was formulated as a laboratory and a commissioned work on the topic "choreography in the form of printed materials." It would last for 16 days and be completed in conjunction with the performance festival Kondenz, also in Belgrade.

Most of the members were meeting for the first time, with no knowledge of each other's work and with different artistic

backgrounds. Of the nine invited, eight participated: Mathilde Chénin, visual artist from France; Maja Ćirić, curator from Serbia; Ana Dubljevic, dancer and choreographer from Serbia; Malin Elgán, choreographer from Sweden; Marko Milic, visual artist and choreographer from Serbia; Isin Onol, curator from Turkey; Roger Rossell, photographer from Spain; Ljiljana Tasic, architect and choreographer from Serbia; and Larraitz Torres, visual artist from Spain.

The laboratory title "Choreography of Attention" was provided by Station and its representative, Dalija Acin Thelander, who initiated the lab based on a performance and previous publication, which she had released and produced with Station.

We thus had an invitation, in loose terms, of investigating through choreography and printed materials. Meanwhile, the purpose of the lab remained unknown to us, and the initial working structure did not match our ambitions for how to practice artistic exchange. The only concrete points for us in this given situation would be the uncertainty of what was to be produced and the expected active participation in the collaboration. From this we tried to understand the limitations of the context within the shared space and fill it with ideas of how to proceed. As time and language played

a crucial role in the working conditions, they also became the central issues for our collaboration.

At an early stage we realized that we wanted to move away from the conditions of centralization and competition that the term "attention" seemed to assume, relations formulated as "one thing above another" or "something at the expense of something else" and so forth. In that sense the concept of attention indirectly led us towards a new approach, where we—instead of capturing anyone's attention—wanted to talk about, share and explore experiences.

The first days of the lab consisted of eager discussions with constant references beyond the actual situation we were in; which, as a result, just made the work more and more fragmented. In some way or another we were misled by the positioning and hierarchies that caused, as always, a slow and energy consuming situation for everyone involved. In one large group we had been sitting and listening to one dominant and repetitive single voice—from some sort of self-appointed mentor—and it was difficult for the words to run freely. In contrast to this we found it essential to be able to talk to anyone, at anytime and anywhere. We had to change the situation into different kinds of relationships and conversations, in order to work creatively.

Thereafter we decided to pay attention, to the collective moments, the collective mind and its particular state. Collaboration simply became our key to creativity.

One way of doing this, once we had realized this, was to practice. We started with practical exercises, which we proposed for each other alternately, without knowing where each of these exercises would lead. The exercise could, for example, be looking at some photographs from one person's teenage years for a fixed amount of time, drawing our experiences out of such a practice, or by visiting a library and telling each other about books we had read.

At the same time, we realized the importance of spending time together and therefore started to spend a lot—an abundance—of time together, discussing the limits of when we worked, and when we did not. Any time was a good time for work and there was an openness to all kinds of practice suggestions and formulations. Whether it was about bicycling, eating at the beach or meeting at a bar. This created all kinds of liberating situations, where we allowed ourselves to set each other banal questions such as: What is the most beautiful place you know?

We broke the symmetry of our habits, and the synchronized time of when we were

working: separately, alone or a few at a time, in a parallel structure, so as to cut our usual ways of thinking and let the road twist and turn. The matter of time was made particularly explicit in one of the exercises, "Home performance," and became a proposal for a performance. An e-mail was sent out the day before a planned meeting, or an imagined performance, to an invited or expected audience. The e-mail, accompanied by a sound file with mainstream music, explained how, right now, readers were experiencing the first part of a performance which, the next day, part two would take place. It was a way to shift the time and the experience of when and where a show, as well as an artistic experience, begins.

Where the aim was to share our experiences with each other—the talks that followed the practice required a different approach to the situation, and to each other. The language developed was based on the situation we were in, and therefore common to us all. A temporary and arbitrary language, using already existing words and terms filled—for this specific purpose—with new content and meaning. It was a way to get around the ideologies and values that language brings, and the limits it can negatively place between us. By reformulating the language for the moment, we demonstrated a generosity and willingness to meet, and move towards each other—unlike in the situation in which we initially got stuck. Gradually we found some sort of intuition, and, at the same time, intellectual ways of communicating between ourselves. Our language was, as we intended, far from efficient, and neither was it meant to create any unique collective position (such as a sports team would, for example). And what was particularly important: we

Our competence, origins, interests and practices were blurred and we were blending them, through what we called an a-symmetric method, where we overcame the barriers of working temporalities, and in a sense made cuts into traditional time. Contradictorily, we gave artistic presentations for each other, to mark out collective experiences, as potential reference points from which to start working together. We did not remain locked to statements such as: "where I come from" or "what I'm competent at", and so, in that sense, the question of origin became meaningless. We chose to develop a crisscrossed way of working, and abandoned our authors' position. We never presented ourselves as specialists in our individual practices. Instead we focused on the possibilities that could emerge from the relationships we

were creating by meeting each other and working together.

Focusing on the in-between, the relations and the process, rather than on our different origins, possible authorship and the results, we develop a constructive way to disagree. Disagreements or misunderstandings were no longer obstacles to the process. They did not create barriers between each individual, subjectives, or positions. On the contrary, they helped us to broaden the field of our common interests, and to identify the dichotomies we were working on, such as imposing/proposing, instructions/associations and physicality/non-materiality.

In our relationship to language, we developed the beginnings of a dictionary, formulated as "Proposals for a crisscrossed organization and a constructive practice of disagreement. ...to be nourished with your own concerns." The language codes in particular, had to do with joke building. As in circles of friends, it sometimes happens that words are invented amongst them, for intimate secrets and socially shared characters or phenomenon. But instead of making jokes we used this to understand each other, and construct a singular artistic structure. As an example from the dictionary shows:

"si si moment" is the point of reaching an agreement. This frequently used at the end of a long discussion that is not going anywhere. It is usually combined with a long e ending, and upper body movements including arms and shoulders, as if dancing to Mexican hip-hop. It is an action provoked by a wish to transform a hmm moment into more constructive one, more of a live-end to the conversation, rather than a dead-end. It comes with a joy of agreement.

group developed a methodology for t-shirt printing. In a sort of blunt way, t-shirt printing related to both the laboratory situation as well as typical festival occasions, while problematizing issues seemed to fly out the window. The idea's simplicity seemed to create a practical accessibility and ideologically free zone. Pictures as well as typical t-shirt-texts such as "I love..." were taken from the Internet as well as our own drawings and lines said and heard during our two weeks we worked together. The prints suggested finally ended up in the format of a comic, with an almost documentary as well as methodological story within.

One of the participants described the work as a short-circuit. Such as occurs regardless of—or rather, because of—low resistance in the connection, and why a high current

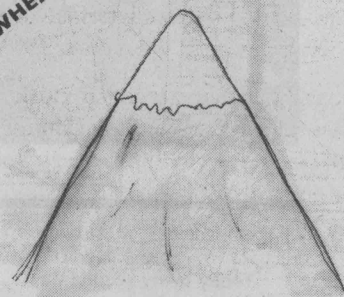
appears, making the cell deliver a large amount of energy in a short time. This can be likened to when irony or a joke is constructed and laughter occurs; we appear, in a similar way, to have low resistance, and to be able to create a circuit when positive and negative are touched. What, in other words, makes the joke is the ability to see its significance from different or opposite perspectives.

In the end, it was a matter of getting the lab to produce results and to present these during the coming festival. Since the topic of the lab was choreography and printed materials, the most obvious and easy solution would be the creation of a choreographic score, presented in a printed form. Essentially we wanted to avoid the kind of neutrality that scores, as well manifestos, often assume in terms of an objective, informative and instructional language. In addition, the score concept is routinely used in choreography, and when it comes to text and image it is, without reflection, called a score. The intention was specifically to go beyond that traditional form of choreographic score current since the 60s and 70s. Instead of frameworks, we were looking for an associative work that could generate even more ideas. And, in contrast to neutrality, we were more focused on some form of poetic organization.

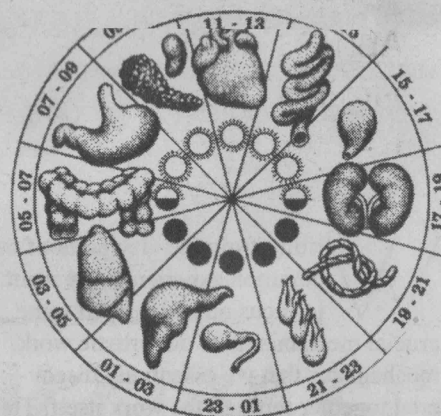
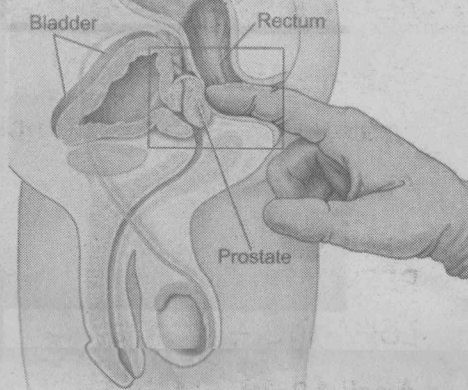
Decoration was a concept that had come up during our process and we decided to use it as the basis for our relationship to the festival, as well as for our presentation in general. The concept of decoration was linked to its twisted relationship with linguistic concepts, especially the generally informal approach we had developed. And with our distance from the tradition of a general score we aimed at a playful engagement with the audience, rather than merely scatter some of the practical exercises we had done throughout the festival, as a way to, so to speak, decorate it. But we quickly realized how that kind of materialization would present us with a number of serious technical issues, and demand solutions that would override the non-representational aims we had. Rather, we wanted to present a mass of unconnected research material.

Instead, to let the work take shape, we created a web widget, a piece of characteristic computing architecture, containing such things as folders and sub-folders as a package, into which we simply inserted our research material, in all of its then current forms: texts, images and sounds. The idea was to present the material as raw and re-usable. It was an attempt to give the research material an insubstantial form because of our resistance to summarize or

WHERE IS THE CHOREOGRAPHY THERE?

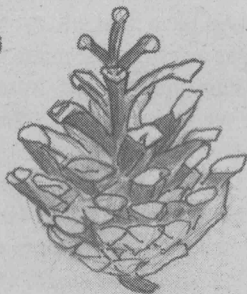


CHOREOGRAPHY OF ATTENTION



01-03 - organization tools	13-15 - instructions
04-05 - curating	15-17 - yes/no
06-07 - autopilot	17-19 - miranda july
07-09 - multitasking	19-21 - production
09-11 - grids of attention	21-23 - ordering food
11-13 - laptops	23-01 - presentation

SECT



- We need to brake up, you're not elastic enough

YOUR JOB MAKE A DIFFERENCE



WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU MADE THE SPAGATTE