

The body at war against itself – a text by Frida Sandström

Today, the notion of "war" can be replaced by the notion of "crisis" – a climate crisis, an economic crisis and a humanitarian crisis. It's an anthropocentric crisis and the collapse of human's domination of earth and each other. Thus, this crisis is more than ever located in the human body. According to performance researcher Amy Bryzgel, the performing body reminds us that it's socio-somatic matter (the social body) is already located within a political system¹. In her new choreographic piece *Warrior* (2018), Anne-Mareike Hess lets her own performing body harbor the fragmentation of dominating narratives, stories that no longer can be told as wholes. It truly is a contemporary performance, and to explain what I mean with this, I need to unpack the word "contemporary" itself.

According to philosopher Peter Osborne, the contemporary is constituted by the "coming together of different times"². Boris Groys, in his turn, understands the notion in its most literal sense, as a con-temporary; comradening of time. Being in time, with time, the very notion is also contested: "Art ceases to be present, to create the effect of presence—but it also ceases to be "in the present," understood as the uniqueness of the here-and-now", Groys writes³.

We are haunted by "nows", The Invisible Committee writes in their book entitled *NOW* (2017), continuing their argument with stating that just like the past once was a now, also the future will be. And the only way to understand the past is to enter its "now" and to read it from in there: "It's to feel the faint breath of the air in which the human beings of yesterday lived their lives"⁴. In other words, to understand history we need to enter the now of lived lives, of livable memories and of their future consequences as we experience them today. We have to bear them all in one breath. The now is the action at war.

Warrior is the third piece in Anne-Mareike Hess' ongoing research on the "emotional body". Different from previous works, Hess surpasses the performer's objective gaze onto a supposed audience, and let the performing body burst over itself. There is nothing more to hide, the fight with subjectivity has already started. In the physical excavation, she lets the choreography surpass itself, at once pumping the body full of material - and emptying it all out. This is a body of noisy memories, whose senses flow beyond it's physical scape. It's body of the now is at war against itself.

Today, an increasing amount of alienated individuals live on an overpopulated planet where physical contact and proximity threatens a desired self-preservation, rather than promising redemption and relief. Through an everlasting separation, stillness grows into muteness, shields for noise that disables gestures to mix. For many, it is too heavy to carry the present. If we touch each other, it might burst forth. We are in debt of social time. As such, conceptual interpretations of the body's role in society are somewhat non-essential

¹ Bryzgel, Amy. (2017). *Performance art in Eastern Europe since 1960*, s. 103.

² Osborne, Peter. (2013). *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, s.163.

³ Groys, Boris. (2009). "Comrades of Time". *e-flux Journal* 11.

⁴ Invisible Committee. (2017). *NOW*, s. 10.

and we rather need to mobilize from the embodied perspective of history. The body is the battle field. Close your eyes and listen.

To “master” sound means, in a musical context, to clear it from its non-intended noise. To clear the movement. The word “mastering” implies a certain power over that which sounds and moves. An external, non-mute agent, takes over the sonic structure of the body. The body’s sonorous knowledge take shape as a noise - leaking beyond it’s skin and memory. The working body’s sonic somatics cannot be cleared from the noise that it produces, and there are always sonorous parts that cannot be mastered. Just like the factory has been the main ground for both exploitation and resistance for waged men, the body has been for women in capitalist society, once argued Silvia Federici⁵. In the post-capitalist society of today, the resisting body of noise is made unreadable, intelligible and non-existent - independent on its struggle. Thus we need to respond to what we cannot hear, respond to the questions that are never posed—the nows that never happened.

Responding to sounds multiplies their resonance, responding to silence embodies its absent echo. Through response, we hear ourselves as others – taking responsibility for our presence and immerse ourselves into its consequences. We move through listening as it renders sound in space. Without doing so, there would be an absolute silence. “Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites”, writes Michel Foucault, meaning that the debt in livable time and space is not only a question of vacant resources for life – but also a question of what relations and shared sensations that will be passed onto the future⁶.

The “polytopia”, as Foucault calls it, is a jukebox where beginning and end coincide. In Warrior, this jukebox coincides with the performers body, and through her breath, yawns and singing, Hess remixes narratives with her muscular transitions. As spectators, we are reminded that we are all bodies as time where stuttering, action and consequence coincide in noisy gestures. Once in a while, she stop abruptly and let the words empty out in the vacant void, which in turn gets activated and responds. So goes the social percussion. In the outburst, the body brings its history within each possible gesture, the potential kinesis. The noise of silent sound. Silence is always plural. When moving, we join it’s future tunes as if they were heard here and now.

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⁵ Federici, Silvia. (1988). *Caliban and the Witch*.

⁶ Foucault, Michael. (1967). *Of Other Spaces*.