

Play > Urban

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Univérs
des Mots

Context
Conakry

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space in the context of my work

i understand space as the horizon of (my) work, (my) thinking, (my) artistic exploration(s).

space is the multifaceted fabric in which my work emerges, becomes entangled, changes, and in which it is thought.

space is the background, the foreground, the context, the coordinates of thinking, acting, and inventing a work that is created with it.

i cannot think of my artistic work without space.

i understand space as a complex fabric of material, texture, order, knowledge — as the structure, as a grooved or dented lived practice.

i understand space as an archive of its planning, foresight, and at the same time as an archive of its manifold infiltrations and transformations.

spaces encounter me, they come to me.

sometimes i search for certain spaces, only to discover that they do not exist. often, in the search for a space, encounters with other spaces occur — spaces that i could not have imagined, spaces that touch or shake me. spaces that encounter something in me. this encounter happens through the way something that gathers in this space reveals itself, fits, positions itself, or its reference to something else.

some spaces leave something behind in me.

there are spaces that i cannot forget, even if they no longer exist. some spaces leave a trace, create a hunch, evoke a mood, trigger a suspicion. sometimes it is also the assertion of this space over its surroundings, the rejection or the fusion, the existence within its specific context.

in the search for spaces, i encounter other spaces. something imprints itself, gets caught in me, and (re) opens a polyphonic narrative. this, in its polyphony, needs time for listening or simply time to grasp it (the space) again and again differently. and as a body in it, to experience itself along with the space. to create it.

this listening in and with a space becomes part of (my) work, writes my work. my work merges with the space, pushes itself away from it, rubs against it, experiences time, material, and thoughts in it. i fantasize in the space, imagine space and try to read it. i never try to determine what it is or should be, but try to read the space over and over again. at different times of day and seasons, in different conditions; i try to remain curious about the space. i am curious about what it reveals of itself in it, with it, how, and in what way.

a work carries the space with it, when the work moves around, wanders, nomadizes. a work can contain different spaces that interweave, overlap, and intertwine. thus a work is also at the same time a collage of the different spaces in which it was created. it interweaves "something" between places. a movement, a word, a sound, a thought, a special material, a certain color, a structure of acts and things, can be the memory of a present place or one that no longer exists. it could only come into being with and in this place.

you, unknown
 i immerse myself in you
 measure me and you
 your time becomes my time
 and my time yours
 you are also the time
 that is possible for you
 the first meeting with you, space, must be in
 silence.
 without language.
 otherwise, language eats you.
 smoothes you, folds you, distorts you.
 i meet you for the first time, preferably alone,
 to feel you, to grasp you, to sense you.
 in this first silent meeting, are you an infinite
 possibility or a sad story?
 or a place of anarchy or a site of an excavation,
 which penetrates the layers of your skins?
 the layers of your past that have made you what
 you are now.

spaces become parts of the thoughts i create within
 them. they are the outer skin of a possibility. thinking
 about, thinking in terms of spaces, is something
 different. when i think in spaces, i become part of them
 or they become part of me. certain thoughts or
 imaginings arise only in special spaces. some thoughts
 are unthinkable in certain spaces, others push or arise
 only there. these thoughts become actions, words,
 movements, interventions, light, space.

but what affects me in a space? touches my
 emotions? what exactly is it? is it the spirits of the dead
 that occupy it? (in indonesia i was told that every
 supposedly empty space is inhabited by ghosts.) is it
 the future that speaks from the joints between stones or
 grout between tiles? or is the space just a material
 in which my imagination creates assemblages of the
 improbable?

spaces change through the traces that emerge
 during their processing. every image, every
 representation, every word becomes part of space,
 becomes part of its knowledge, its concatenation of
 material, architecture, images, sounds, and narratives.
 spaces can be transformed or destroyed, because
 every process, every function changes its substance,
 its nature. space is always also a memory. a space can
 be its various representations. a space leaves a trace
 in the memory of each individual who has experienced
 it, because these fragments become part of the
 consciousness of the space, its reality.

how is it possible to decolonize space or spaces
 from the linearity of their temporal genealogy — its
 cartographies in the form of plans, maps, illustrations,
 or photographs? what consequence does it have
 towards the comprehension of space, if time is not a
 linear sequence, yet happening simultaneously present,
 future, and past?

if all times of a space are present in the moment in
 which i find myself within it, how do the times materialize
 in it, or do they exist at all? or else: how do i grasp space
 if it always manifests itself at all times at the same time
 or if it acts in it or with it?

working with spaces

in the city

wasteland as archaeology and inbetween space

in 2016 i searched for an inner-city wasteland in vienna. a leftover residual space in the city, as a non-functional area that occupies space between times. an urban wasteland with traces of the past, the overgrowth of the present, as an occupation of space. as a possible opening, as a "not-yet". grasses, plants that grow around piles of stones. an imprint of the absent. on the border wall of this wasteland, there are traces like torn scars. the roof shows itself, stands out, brightly on the darkened firewall.

unspectacular. enclosed. borders on all sides. residences built at different times. a city desert, an excavation site, a third landscape with traces of previous construction. remembered stories: an inn, a car repair shop, and a residence with a tree in the courtyard.

over 10 weeks, i developed a choreography with five performers on this wasteland. during the development, the choreography became acquainted with local residents, the stones and plants that grew on it. finally, adorned with the large letters "IDEAL PARADISE", spectators sat or stood around the construction fence that secured the site. a paradisiac arrangement of an inaccessible, protected space. at the end of the choreography, the partition opened, and with the help of the spectators, the letters were carried to the next location of this urban composition *IDEAL PARADISE*.

this fallow ground stayed in my head and asked me questions, demanding further attention. the place claimed another time. i dealt with other times of artistic production: durational settings and the repetitive routines of everyday actions. based on this fallow i created the work *168 stunden (a tribute to every day life and franz erhard walther)*, in which i occupied this place for 168 hours. two equal-sized areas, each the size of a one-room apartment. each 35m², laid out with two tons of pebbles, five meters apart. surrounded by walkways three or four meters apart, with some seating platforms for visitors. on each surface, there were the same things: bed, table, chair, armchair, refrigerator, lamp, stove, pot, cutlery, toilet, "shower". i invited my friend, the architect and artist bettina vismann, to publicly inhabit this place with me for 168 hours, a fallow land of about 800m², and not to leave the respective "apartment" for that amount of time.

we left our spaces only once a day during the 168 hours to encounter each other performatively with textile objects (as a tribute to franz erhard walther). along with performative scores we measured the "terrain" poetically, before we went back to our parallel spaces.

we did not talk to each other. we observed each other and the everyday life that took place around this fallow. we exhibited our everyday actions and observed the everyday life happening around us. a part of our arranged score was a three-hour writing practice twice a day: descriptions of the space. we described what we perceived. with each hour the place changed, it became a delving into its time. the consistency of the place changed, a "liquefying of the walls" that surrounded the place became perceptible. not speaking, not being directly involved in verbal communication, the silence, intensified the experience of the space with its physical interactions, gazes, actions, situations, events.

the silence let me sink into the place and its different dimensions. the birds at sunrise, which became louder and louder until it overtook the noise of the street traffic. the movement of the sun, which changed the visible things. the changing temperatures, rain, sun, wetness. silent associations, noticing each other's presence, over time, direct or indirect complicity with passersby or residents. they were sometimes concerned, or affectionate, or curious. the bedsheet hanging from the windows every morning, thrown out the window, telling the story of the previous night.

at sunset, we simultaneously projected our notes and observations of the day onto two firewalls. as performers we appeared and read along, receiving information about each other's experience in the same place. we shared our experience in the place through the writing that appeared through light on the roughened walls. on walls that bordered this wasteland.



in the city
 research and interventions in urban space in kiev
 traumatic wound of a place

another way of dealing with the city was the work *applied poetics in urban space*, which was created together with the architecture collective urban curators from kiev. this work connected five topologically different places along a subway line with poetic interventions. while researching space and traveling through kiev, i focused on only one of these five sites: *majdan nesaleshnosti* ("square of independence"), which was the site of the orange revolution in 2004. at the end of 2013, beginning of 2014, the square was again in the news. pictures of barricades of the euromaidan movement, which were erected on it by protesters after the violent suppression of student protests. 80 people killed between february 18-21, 2014, some of them shot by snipers from surrounding rooftops. the union's house almost completely burned down. trauma of a square, trauma of ukraine, which commemorates the victims of the crackdown on protests with privately erected memorials on trees, or on the street.

i wanted to close this place for an hour to create an ephemeral monument. to empty the place, to be able to look at it again, to be able to look at it collectively and remember its events, its experiences. as a reoccupation of the roofs — in memory of the violence inflicted by snipers — people on the roofs should wave colored maps. the tangibly traumatic memories were to be collectively given space and time to create space, to remember. an empty space that one collectively surrounds, encircles, and looks upon in silence, as an attempt to heal a place, as an ephemeral, performative, collective monument.

it was not possible to realize the project in this form. nevertheless, i find this grim palimpsest-like space worth mentioning here: as a traumatic public, urban scar.

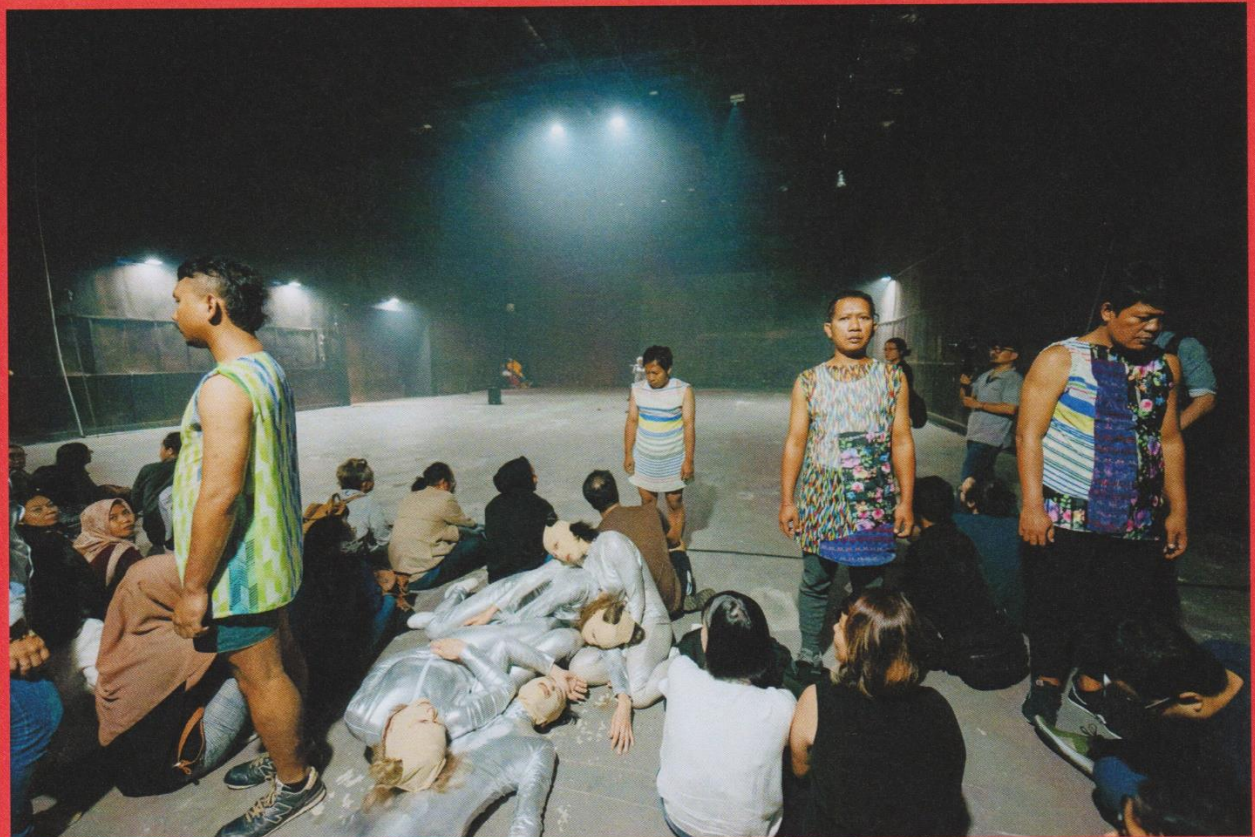
museum
 archive, space and knowledge

in 2015 i was invited to develop a work at the weltmuseum vienna. the museum was closed for renovation and reconceptualization at the time.

i accepted the invitation under the condition that i would be able to work in the rooms for three months and have access to the collection, the archives, and the curators' knowledge. the museum is located in the "corps de logis", adjoining the new burg wing, which was originally built as a residential wing and has housed the este collection since 1912. the heir to the throne franz ferdinand of austria-este brought home around 15,000 objects from his trip around the world in 1892/93, which form the basis of this collection. the museum of ethnology was opened in these rooms in 1928. the rooms on the first floor were made available to me, each about 110m² and connected to each other by wing doors. the rooms were completely empty, without exhibition objects, only occupied by mostly glassless, metal, massive exhibition showcases, commissioned by franz ferdinand. occasionally there were exhibition signs or photographs on the floor.

i had chosen six adjoining rooms for the second step to *IDEAL PARADISE*, and during my three-month residency i had access to the rooms, the archives, and insights into their specific arrangements of the collection objects, as well as the possibility to discuss with the curators there their knowledge and their approaches to ethnography, the collection and the regions subordinated to them, which, curatorially partitioned in the museum, formed the context of the confrontation. the organizational structure, the intellectual and material stock became part and subject of my artistic practice. the quest in these spaces lasted for these three months — while being faced with the (institutional) restrictions and different understandings of the curators and conservators (who see themselves as long-standing advocates of the objects).

together with the curators, i inspected the archives, the different parts of the archives, and tried to understand their narratives of the collection. i was interested in the history of the collection and the various and overwritten assignments of individual objects over the years. different time documents of colonial thinking. i was interested in the order of the archive, the arrangement of the goods, the personal narratives, and how an object became part of the collection.



transpositions

jakarta: searching for a space

the experience of a city without sidewalks. tender choreographies of an incredible number of cars and motorcycles on the streets. dances of togetherness. each of the one- to two-hour car rides was for me in this short time an instructive exercise in mindfulness and fluid togetherness. this dealing with dysfunctional traffic regulations and state order taught me something that was not familiar to me.

we visit the city: monuments that transfigure history with fictional dioramas of certain ideological narratives into "provable" facts. but i am also interested in the outskirts of the city, the edges of the settlements that are not intended for representation. the harbor with illegal workers. the sprawling garbage next to the harbor village floating in the water, on the edge of the kampung aquarium, evacuated by the police. the children swimming, perhaps looking for fish in this certainly contaminated oily water. the shacks in front of a newly built skyscraper with someone—perhaps a worker—peeking out. the dump with broken fragments of carousel animals from an amusement park. and so forth.

but we are looking for a space for a work that already exists, and should be adapted for the local and spatial context: a space that can become a local resonance space for the transfer of this work. a space that is a decaying document of history and at the same in former times a venue for analog work. we visit some colonial buildings, but it seems that this context is not right. finally, we visit the site of the former national film studios of indonesia, which have not been used for 20 years and are now tentatively being used again. these studios were built in jakarta in the 1930s by the dutch. propaganda films were produced there during the japanese occupation. the studios became the most important film studios of the new republic of indonesia, which declared itself independent in 1945; finally officially approved in 1949. after suharto's coup, entertainment films were made there, as well as an important propaganda film: a fiction of his legitimate takeover of power. visually stunning, this film legitimizes suharno's removal from power with bloody anti-communist propaganda. this film propagated the narrative that led up to two million deaths in 1965.

i was interested in the partly dilapidated architecture, the leftover objects, and film reels. i wanted to work with this space, where the images of national identity were produced under different ideological premises. a large part of the studios and laboratories are ruins, with remnants of open film reels bursting with negatives. the studios have not been used since 1998, since the abdication of the new order regime under general suharto. recently, small films were shot in the still more or less intact complex or advertisements for cafe.

a detail: i asked the participating 10 indonesian artists to recall films shot in these studios acoustically.

one example was suharno's speech at the african-asian bandung conference of 1955. an important document and undertaking of the decolonial movement of the formerly colonized countries that invented the concept of the third world as a self-conscious alternative between the two political blocs.

in my production it was spoken chorally by the whole team, gradually dissolving into a polyphonic chorus: with recollections of music, dialogues and sounds, from films produced in this studio.

pandemic break and new spaces
frontal on stage

for my first solo work, i approached the tanzquartier vienna. i needed the institution, as an obligatory call, to realize this work. i wanted to publish this thinking with my body in space. therefore i rehearsed in different spaces and studios. each space changed the work. i planned an installative landscape that could be walked through by spectators. its stations would link material and choreographic actions. experiencing and thinking in the moment with the spectators. i wanted to decide in the moment of the performance, from which object or action, how and to which one i changed. pleasurable physical thinking in space, the design of an energetic narrative of action as a spatial composition with and within the present audience. an evacuation of the present, as the subtitle of ORACLE and SACRIFICE would reveal. but then came the pandemic and the constraints that came with it: constraints on the material, the organs i could work with, and the prescribed physical distancing. so after 25 years of experimental theater within shared spaces, i decided to develop a frontal stage work and to include these specific conditions of space. i chose a central-perspective, warped, space-within-a-space situation, a white box within the black box of the theater space. to exhibit the materials and the themes i used and to make visible the process of transformation, from one state of a material to another.

i changed the modes of working: after experimenting with material and temporality, the momentary narration or sequence of actions, the necessity of a spatial-temporal sequence arises with the frontal stage space, which works perspectively with the closeness and distance to the audience. i developed a chronology in a completely illuminated space, which plays with the entering-into-the-foreground and entering-into-the-background of the present objects, organs and my body. the regime of the perspective gaze of the now seated audience also changes the sensitive penetration in the different encounters with and into my body: the time of transformations, the time of sensations, which informs me in certain ways, the progression of movement.

reading in the flesh. this frontal arrangement tilts my body. i have to reclaim the three-dimensionality of space again and again, by remaining a body and not becoming a one-sided surface: a body that feels, thinks, and perceives.

the frontality pours a time image or a time sequence into the space. this space of representations and symbols expects, wants to recognize, to assign. but i want to withdraw the transformations and the symbols again, to liquefy them. an oracle.

the conquest of different qualities. a challenge and yet movements, states, a dialogue that wants to be shared and seen. the attention of the rising rows of spectators squeezes my space because it defines itself in height. one space. two spaces that want to become one space again. to be seen. the co-presence of the objects. the objects look back, they do not collapse in being an object, but they exist, they look and change in time. they change to each other in time, as i change to myself and to them.

pandemic break and new spaces
in the woods

i want to develop this work *ORACLE and SACRIFICE*, which was first presented in the black box of tanzquartier vienna, in the forest. expose and question in this space. confront movements and thoughts with pieces of the forest: trees, roots, and other bodies, the knowledge of the newly involved.

a space whose boundary is the earth and the root soil, or the sky above the treetops. a space defined by the rhythm of the wind in the trees and other growth: a lifting and lowering. a space defined by the rhythm of its roots and its dead wood — which decomposes and overgrows, becomes food for other living things. becomes another matter. this space is always different, in every season and time of day, in every type of weather.

this space has different formations, accessible from different sides. accessible from all sides, it has many directions, many functions, and participations, territories, and cohabitations. walkers pass through it. the forest harbors much that is beyond human perception, not visible to the human eye, or audible to the ear, but perceptible nonetheless. the forest is inhabited by various species that make it habitable for themselves, that feed on it, fly over it, burrow through it.

the multiplicity of the living material, which changes permanently and to each other, tunes this space, which is a space of dependencies. it is the chronicle of the interventions of humankind, of the climate, of the air, of the animals, of the plants, of the fungi. i can read it, feel it, hear it, grasp it in 100 different ways. it eludes permanently and calls up cultural myths, which dwell in the barks, roots, and holes of the dead trees. it is material polyphony, a multi-layered order. it is my childhood, my fears, and my dreams about the varied and animated nature of matter. it is the place where forces gather that elude rational human orders of things. it can be analyzed scientifically, but will never fully be grasped. this place has a time, but no duration, because it has another time that transcends duration. because it is.

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