



*Against the
Neutral
Image*

Essays on the Exhibition
Choreography of Violence
by Jelena Jureša

Ed. Sanja Bojanić

CAS SEE
EDITIONS





Center for Advanced Studies
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University of Rijeka

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of Violence by Jelena Jureša
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We offer this volume as an edited space of encounter, shaped through collaborations between artistic, curatorial, and critical practices. As the second publication in the CAS SEE imprint, it continues our commitment to creating space for transdisciplinary exchange—work that emerges from, moves through, and remains answerable to the region, without reducing it to a bounded object. We work from Southeast Europe as a point of orientation rather than a frame of containment: a place from which different histories and vocabularies meet, overlap, and sometimes remain in productive tension.

Against the Neutral Image is not conceived as an exhibition catalogue. While the exhibition *Choreography of Violence* by Jelena Jureša forms an essential point of departure, the book is an edited volume that takes that parting seriously as method: not to preserve an event, but to extend its questions; not to stabilize meaning, but to trace how meaning is staged. It asks how violence is rendered visible or invisible, framed, timed, aestheticized, normalized, or refused—across images, institutions, languages, and publics. In doing so, it insists that neutrality is never merely a style of presentation but often a technique of power: an arrangement of distance, attention, and responsibility.

The publication originated from a collaborative effort involving CAS SEE, MMSU Rijeka, and KASK & Conservatorium, thereby establishing a foundation for this convergence of scholarly work and thought. We express our gratitude for this shared infrastructure, as well as for the various forms of care—intellectual, practical, and institutional—that facilitated the realization of this publication. Without the film works of Jelena Jureša, there would be neither an exhibition nor such a collaborative project, nor this publication. We also extend our thanks to the contributors Francesca Raimondi, Shahram Khosravi, Maria Hlavajova, Branka Benčić, and Sanja Bojanić for their insightful texts, which explore themes of imagery, violence, memory, breath, borders, and responsibility from diverse perspectives, without urging the reader to hastily conform to a singular vocabulary or conclusion.

The symposium and finissage continue the book's logic of encounter, bringing these conversations into a shared space and extending the publication through dialogue rather than treating the printed volume as an endpoint. We are equally indebted to the labour that shaped the book, both materially and editorially. We want to thank Ana Labudović for the design and Valeria Graziano for editorial coordination.

At a time when images and violence again structure public discourse globally—and when what can be shown, said, or even mourned is increasingly contested—this book insists on returning to a foundational question: under what conditions do images circulate, speak, demand, or remain withheld? We offer it as an invitation to stay with that question, collectively, and to refuse the comfort of neutrality where neutrality is impossible.

Rejecting the idea of a neutral image, we do not aim to create a superficial technique—one that violence uses as an aesthetic, institutional, or rhetorical mask to remain visible without consequences. An image functioning only as evidence, documentation, or information might claim an existence beyond the conflict it shows. It might try to be trusted especially where trust is hardest to establish. Neutrality isn't about lacking a stance; rather, it's a stance that has learned to conceal itself.

We begin with a fundamental premise: violence not only occurs within the visual representations but also in the manner of their presentation. This encompasses framing and cropping, distance and scale, sequencing and pacing. It is reflected in the brightness of white walls and the softness of wall text, as well as in the authority conveyed by captions, the calmness of institutional language, and the choice to omit naming as a form of containment. Violence is carefully orchestrated by the camera, the archive, the curator, the institution, and by the viewer's cultivated habits of attention.

An exhibition does not merely display images; it actively constructs relationships—proximity and distance, empathy and indifference, shock and sedation. It renders some bodies highly visible while others remain

abstract, and it assigns roles—witness, expert, tourist, consumer—each accompanied by ethical implications.

This book suggests that an exhibition is more than simply a container; it functions like a score.

A choreography of violence encompasses not just dramatic images of harm but also the slow, bureaucratic, and infrastructural forms of damage that fade into the background as “context,” “history,” and “complexity.” It highlights how institutions turn brutality into culture and suffering into content. It also refers to the ritual of observing that replaces active response with mere recognition, and to the aestheticization that renders the unbearable tolerable, makes tragedy understandable, and wounds narratable—often at the expense of those affected.

In contrast to neutral images, we ask:

Who gains a nuanced view,
and who is simplified into a case?

Who is portrayed as a subject,
and who appears as a surface?

What feelings does the exhibition evoke—and what feelings does it train us to suppress? When does “context” enlighten, and when does it pacify?

When does restraint become responsibility, and when does it become complicity?

What does it mean to curate violence without sanitizing it? Our goal isn't purity but accountability.

Objecting to the neutral image doesn't mean requesting louder, harsher, or more graphic images. Instead, it means insisting that the conditions for seeing become articulate. It requires that mediation no longer pretends to be natural. Curatorial choices should be recognized as deliberate decisions, not as unavoidable facts. Additionally, institutions should cease hiding behind procedural justifications when procedures are, in fact, how power perpetuates itself.

We insist: every image is a relation.

Every display is an instruction.

Every aesthetic is political.

This is a manifesto for engaged visuality.

Engaged visuality does not equate to propaganda. It signifies a refusal to accept the pretense of neutrality: the language that homogenizes unequal circumstances, the tone that sanitizes conflict into mere ‘issues,’ and the exhibition design that transforms violence into ambiance.

Engaged visuality explicitly states its commitments.

It acknowledges its position. It does not mistake detachment for an ethical stance. It is open to scrutiny, accountability, and revision. Moreover, it does not delegate responsibility to the viewer under the guise of freedom.

Engagement transcends linguistic boundaries because it originates prior to language itself. Before the paragraph, the caption, or the translation, exists the body—its hesitation, focus, habituation, and learned thresholds for harm. The “neutral” image depends on these thresholds; it relies on fatigue and the viewer's desire to maintain integrity. Engaged visuality disrupts this economy, devising new modalities of thinking and sensing precisely where neutrality becomes unattainable: ways of perceiving that do not consume; ways of knowing that do not dominate; ways of showing that do not transform violence into comfort.

We regard the exhibition as a space of responsibility rather than innocence—a place where the frame is visible; where the institution addresses the audience directly; where captions do not anesthetize; where the layout of the exhibition space does not simulate control; where the archive functions not as a tomb but as a demand; where the viewer is recognized not as a customer of suffering but as a participant in meaning.

In opposition to the neutral image, we advocate for forms that resist easy resolution: essays, scores, protocols, and interruptions. We support practices that bear contradiction without converting it into a style.

We endorse curatorial and editorial endeavors
that pursue clarity without claiming purity.

This publication serves as an entry point, not a
conclusion. It is authored with the conviction that
neutrality is no longer a tenable position—if it ever
was. In the face of violence, the only honest inquiry
is not “what does the image show?” but “what does the
image do, and for whom?” It affirms that the exhibition
is not a mere afterthought but an active apparatus. It
recognizes that choreography is never solely movement;
it is the distribution of power in both time and space.

We do not guarantee comfort. Instead, we promise attention
that bears consequences.

Against the neutral image: because the image is never merely
an image. Against the neutral image: because display is never
merely display. Against the neutral image: because violence is
already choreographed—and it is time to alter the score.



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DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

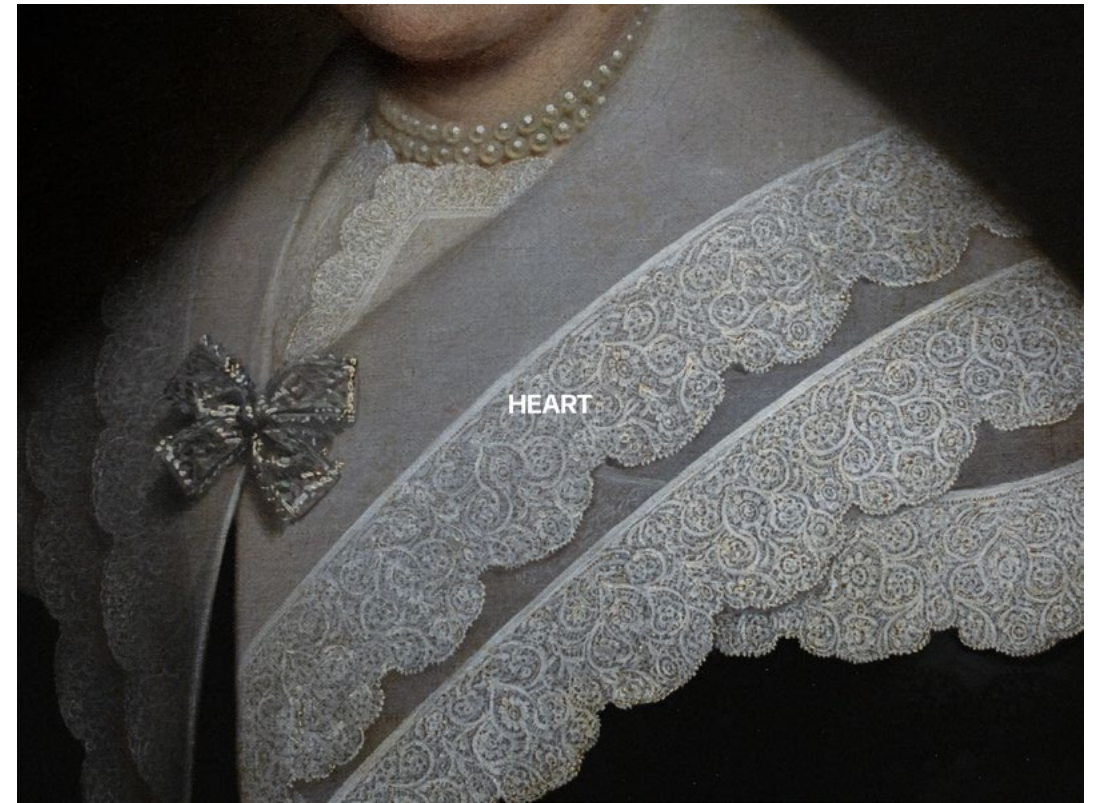
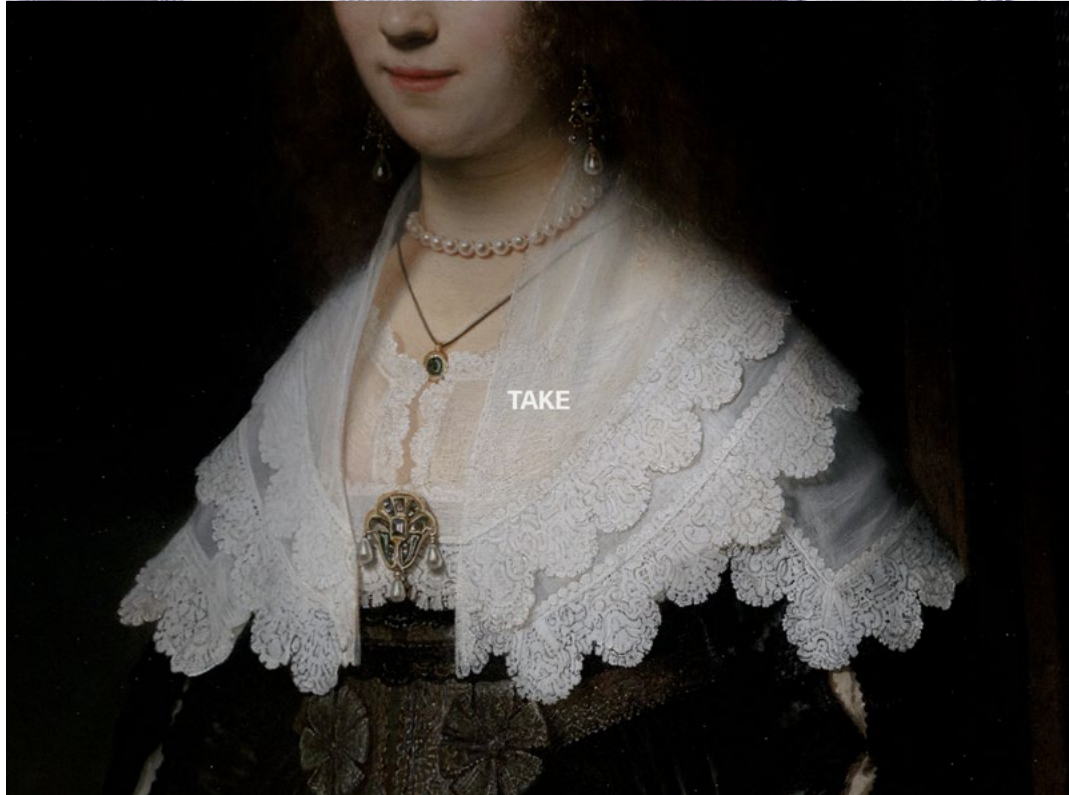
Film/installation

55 min

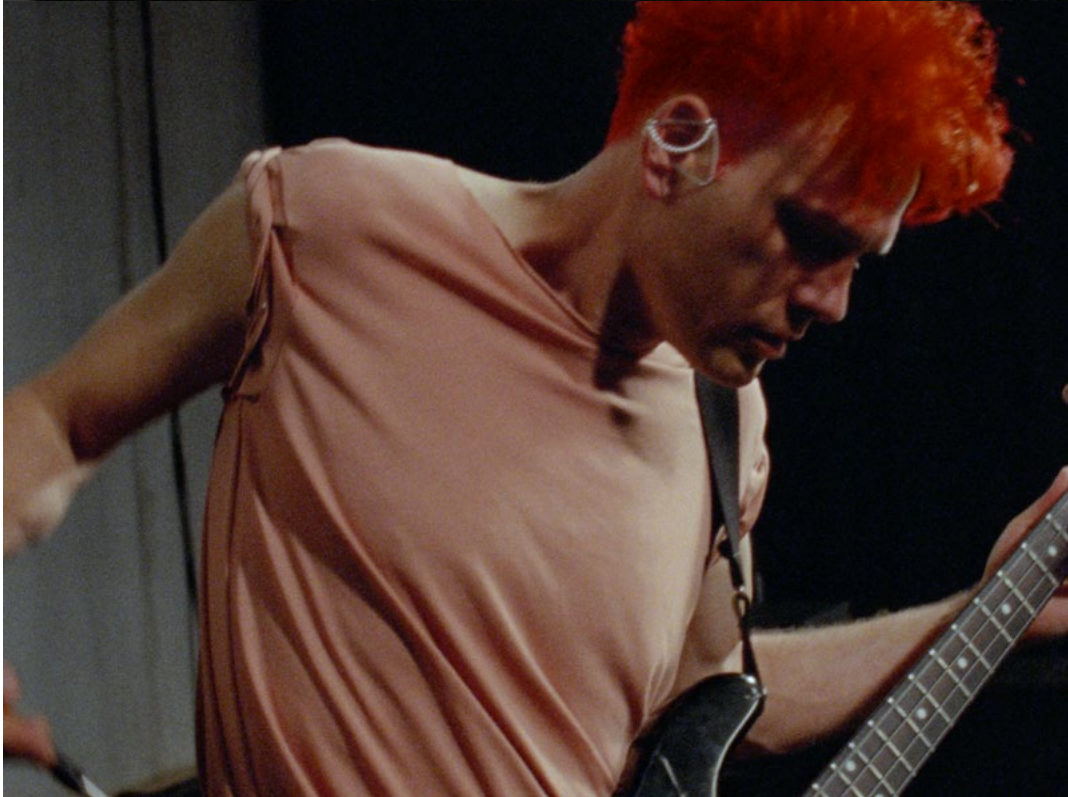
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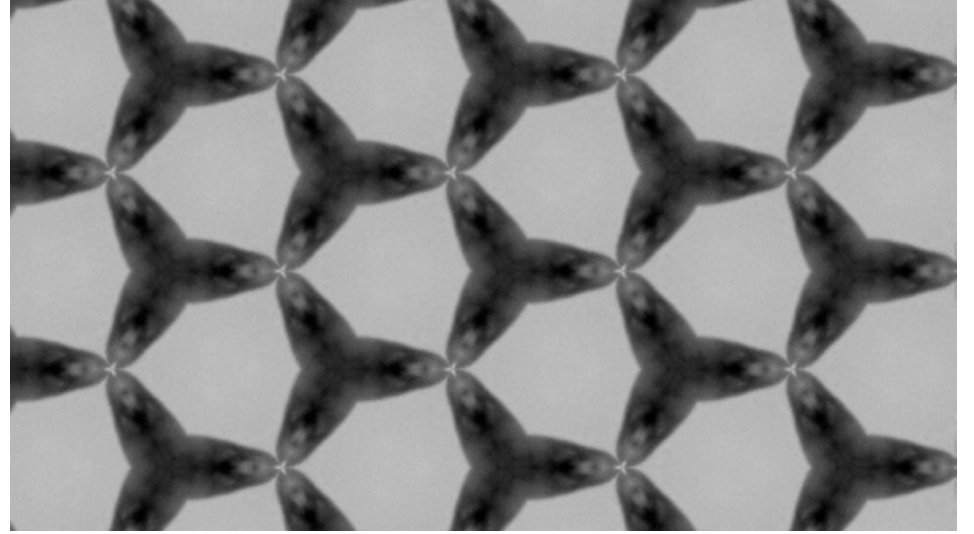


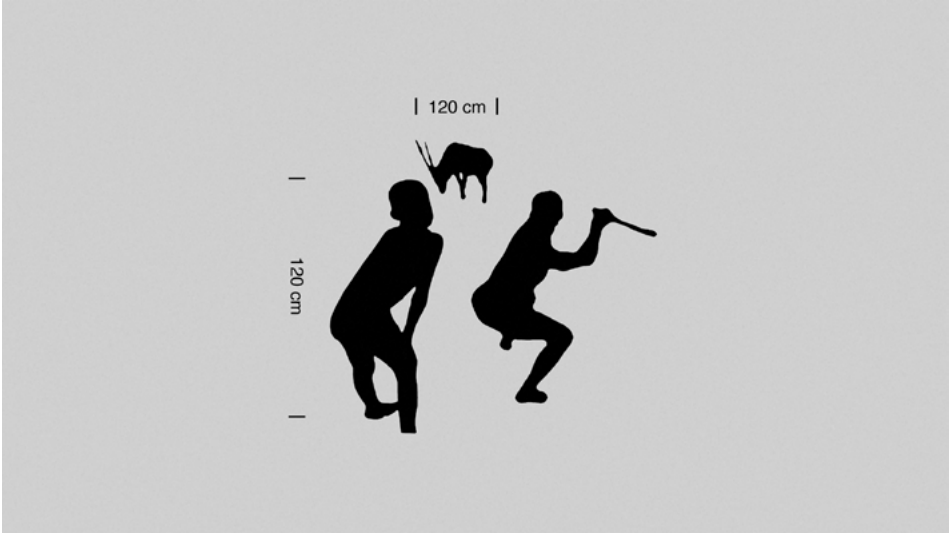
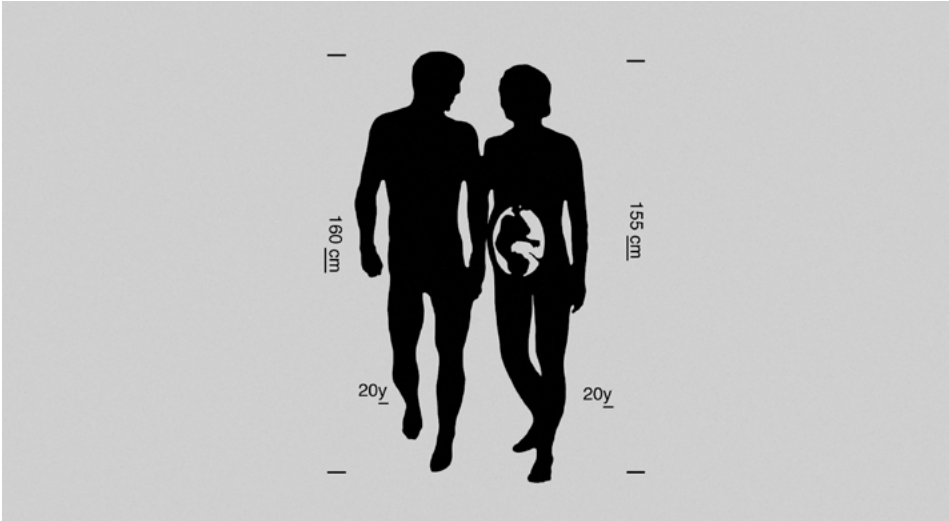




APHASIA
Film/installation
80 min
2019















Y O U R
G O L D E N
H A I R





UBUNDU
Film/installation
17 min
2019

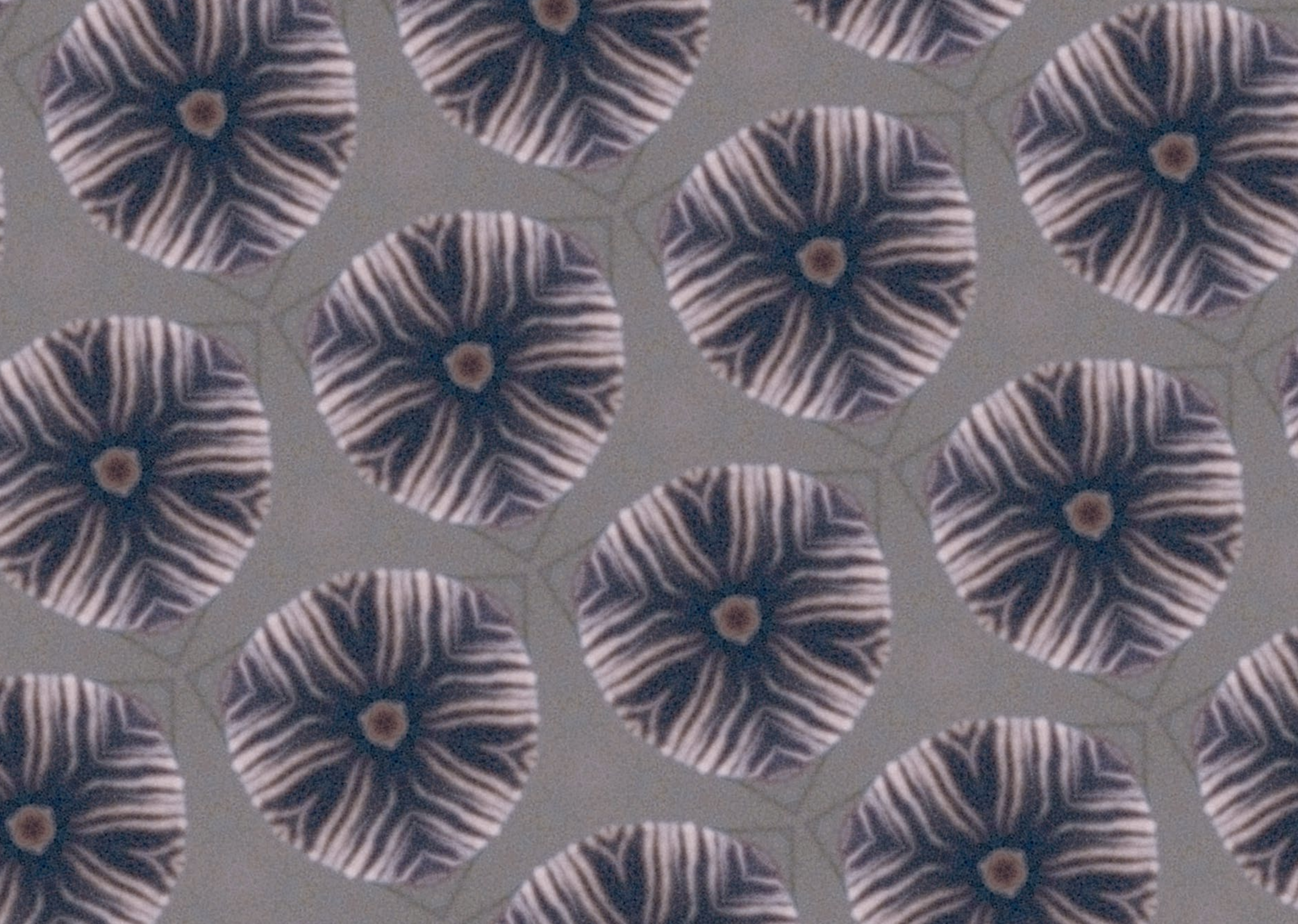














“Everything you see has meaning. I try to play with expectations about the documentary genre, avoid being cryptic, and don’t want to be didactic.” (*Interview: Jelena Jureša & Aernout Mik*)

But to grab the thing itself before even scratching its meaning, the artist’s quest for strategies firstly avoids any form of obscure or inaccessible content of interpretation. The intention is for the audience to experience the effects of all that is seen and heard emotionally, bodily, and at its core ethically, rather than to decode or intellectualise them as puzzles. In other words, to reach understanding through perceiving, one should prioritise affective experience over analytical transparency. Jureša claims that strategies “should not be understood,” suggesting a non-discursive mode of communication that bypasses rational comprehension and instead activates sensory, intuitive, and moral resonances. This recalls Susan Sontag’s idea in *Against Interpretation* (1964). An artist’s work inherits this logic: the strategies should move me, not simply make sense to me. Even though the viewer may not understand the strategy on an intellectual level, their impact is felt through the body, with tension between what’s shown and not shown; sensing vibration between documentary evidence and performative interpretation; registering shock when recognition dawns slowly, as if the meaning is haunted by perception; inhabiting fracture as an aesthetic condition while sensing discontinuity, incompleteness. Narration is abandoned, and the palpable effects act upon the body and perception, influencing rhythm, sound, gesture, silence, and duration. Nothing is arbitrary, even if it’s not immediately legible. There is no need to understand how the meaning has been built—only to sense that it’s there, operating beneath the surface. The task is attunement, not analysis, as the sense of it is not explained but distributed through form, rhythm, colour, gesture, and absence. This should not be a moral lesson or political sermon; it should not obscure ethical stakes under formal experimentation. The strategy is to oscillate between activating critical reflection without preaching or mystifying and the documentary promise of truth. This reveals its instability, so the viewer cannot expect factuality and coherence. Instead, I should encounter ambivalence, embodiment, and emotional timbre. Is the artist manipulating my expectations? No, I am invited to examine my own assumptions about how I watch violence, how I believe images, and how I construct empathy. Yes, Georges Didi-Huberman (*Images malgré tout*, 2004) warns me against overinterpreting atrocity images—the task is to remain with the image’s opacity while still acknowledging

its ethical weight. Jureša’s strategy aligns with Sontag’s call to recover sensory immediacy, yet, like Didi-Huberman, she insists on the opacity of traumatic images—the need to remain with what cannot be made transparent. I should not decode but attune: to look and feel, simply without the illusion of complete understanding.

vibration brings
the feeling of meaning
before meaning itself

So, Jureša’s film poem/essay/concert measure unmeasurable horror surfacing the body, the skin and immersed sound, the breath in moving images that register momentary intensity, not the horror’s explanation. *Aphasia* invokes a photograph it refuses to show; *Ubundu*’s candid-camera registers an unclassified animal body in precisely this way. *Don’t Take It Personally*, refills Dubravka Ugrešić’s words in Nie’s tapping (yes, red shoes are not accidental; Alen and Nenad Sinkauz’s hair colour is not accidental).

How can horror be artistically experienced *by proxy*? What is there to experience? Not the event itself, but its afterimage: a body sensing what it cannot grasp, perception stretched to the limit of comprehension. To experience these films is to inhabit the moment where seeing becomes listening and listening becomes touch—where shock disperses across sound, rhythm, and texture before it coheres as knowledge.

Aphasia opens in near stillness: the frame saturated with pale light, a fragile equilibrium between visibility and erasure. The camera holds close to skin, fabric, or breath rather than to narrative space. The image of the unseen photograph—the soldier’s boot, the fallen body—haunts the film not by absence alone but through the tactility of sound: the faint crackle of tape, the echo of a room, the breath caught before speech. The performer’s gestures are minimal yet charged; her pauses stretch into silences that feel physical. Phenomenologically, the film immerses the viewer in a temporal suspension—the act of seeing itself trembles until vision is slowed. The soundscape functions as proprioception: vibrations through bass frequencies or mic disturbances register as the body’s internal hearing. What we “experience” is not the trauma represented, but the film’s struggle to make perception itself bear that trauma.

In *Ubundu*, perception becomes stratified. The image alternates between observational footage and kaleidoscopic refraction, turning ethnographic seeing into unstable vision. The okapi’s movement—blurred, refracted through mirrors, glass, and patterned light—transforms

the screen into an optical skin. The sound design is spatial rather than melodic: insect hums, metallic reverberations, and human voices overlap to produce an ambient field that refuses orientation. Formally, the film's editing rhythm mimics the irregularities of breathing: expansion and contraction, attack and release. My sensorium is caught between recognition and distortion. I sense the colonial gaze collapsing—not through statement but through dissonance between what I see (animal, cage, museum) and what I hear (voices that do not belong to that space). The “experience” is thus one of being displaced from one's own perceptual position — a bodily analogue to the film's critique of domination.

Don't Take It Personally begins with rhythm: the percussive tapping of Marije Nie's shoes before any narrative emerges. The frame oscillates between the performance stage and the archive, between a frontal portrait and a mirrored reflection. The editing tempo is syncopated with the dancer's rhythm—a choreography of cuts that make the viewer feel time rather than see it. The red of her shoes, the flash of light on metal, and the recurring close-ups of motion blur become affective anchors in a film that otherwise refuses spatial coherence. The sound mix intertwines live tap resonance with archival voices, electronic loops, and sudden silence; each silence functions as an acoustic negative. My body enters a rhythmic empathy, muscles tightening to the beat even as the film withholds narrative satisfaction. My experience is kinaesthetic: I “feel” the film through temporal vibration rather than through plot—empathy as bodily synchronisation with fractured rhythm.

“Everything you see has meaning...” is thus structured through formal and conceptual methods Jelena Jureša uses to organise my experience of seeing and hearing. All three experimental films begin by gradually building their pace, detailing from *nature morte* and *genre* paintings, by juxtaposing documentary and performative modes of expression, mixing archival footage and testimonies, or choreographed scenes into a carefully selected staging of performing segments intersected by photographs that challenge, even irritate, my perception.

absence-as-presence

The strategy of [REDACTED] creates tension due to the refusal to show the incriminating photograph in *Aphasia*. And my attention economy is steadily disrupted through different equivocating contexts of the *Ubundu* kaleidoscope (frequently used in the film). By collapsing historical distances in *Don't Take It Personally* (whose timeline spans from colonial times to recent wars in the former Yugoslavia), individual and collective shame and guilt have been transposed into ongoing

everyday processes. I do experience the restless, vibrating pulse of ruptured meaning.

doubling and mirroring

gnirorim bns gnilduob

In *Aphasia*, this vibrating body is emulated again and again, in a series of doppelgänger structures, through narrative, performative and temporal doubling, as well as spatial and sound mirroring. The Serbian paramilitary soldier becomes a DJ years later, and the nightclubs mirror former battlefields. As Ivana Jozić's body performs both victim and observer, this blurring between witness and participant makes the body itself a site of doubled meanings. Stuttering, fragmented speech, and staged silences thus deprive aphasia of its linguistic nature, tracing unimaginable normalcy. That which is unimaginable and unconceivable to see becomes a sonic experience as sound doubles what is not seen. Again, through vibration.

In the *Ubundu*, the okapi—repeatedly asked “who are you?”—functions as a mirror of estrangement through which the foreigner, the colonial subject, and the migrant are constituted by acts of observation and control, collapsing the boundary between animality and humanity to expose their shared mechanisms of objectification. This living archive of imperial exhibition persists through institutional and linguistic continuities, naturalised within contemporary cultural and scientific discourse. The dual voice—speaking both as animal and displaced subject—exposes the instability of enunciation under domination, embodying rather than narrating trauma and transforming fractured speech into a critical strategy that appropriates mediated forms of expression to reveal their limits and reconfigure agency. The repetition of broken, shouted, and sung utterances functions as a performative critique of linguistic mastery. These disrupted forms of speech evoke (again) aphasia and dislocation, foregrounding the colonial subject's partial access to the language of power. In this sense, silence and fragmentation become counter-discursive gestures—modes of resistance that refuse coherence, transparency, and fluency as instruments of domination. The okapi's enclosure operates as an analogue to the performer's delimited stage, both serving as controlled environments of exposure. Each body is made visible within prescribed boundaries, enacting the intersection of power and vulnerability intrinsic to colonial and performative economies of display. The cage, reimagined as a stage, reveals visibility itself as a disciplinary mechanism—one that transforms the subject into spectacle.

Yet within this exposure lies a counter-potential: the possibility of subverting the gaze by performing it, rendering the act of being seen into a form of critical visibility.

Doubling and mirroring in *Don't Take It Personally* operate as structural and thematic principles that destabilise singularity and expose the layered nature of perception, identity, and historical memory. Visually, repetition of motifs—red shoes, gestures, frames within frames, double portraits—creates echo chambers of meaning in which each image reflects another, denying closure and producing a dialogue between layers of seeing. At the level of performance, Marije Nie's assumption of multiple roles—dancer, witness, narrator, body-in-resistance—embodies a fragmented subjectivity where the personal merges with the collective, rendering fracture and shock as both individual and historical. Linguistically, the incorporation of Ugrešić's texts as living, embodied speech transforms quotation into polyphony, allowing words to resonate through Nie's body rather than remain fixed in literary form. Temporally, the interweaving of present-day performance with the spectral presence of past atrocities—colonial violence, genocide—reveals time as recursive rather than linear, suggesting that histories of domination are not past but continuously re-enacted. Cinematically, the rhythm of tap performance mirrors the rhythm of speech, violence, and protest, creating a formal correspondence between bodily motion and political affect. A multilayered aesthetic of reflection and recursion, in which meaning, identity, and history are experienced together, again as strategies of doubling and mirroring, a multitude of reverberations across image, body, language, and time.

c o n t r o l l e d a m b i g u i t y

By destabilising ethnographic and colonial modes of seeing, the *Ubundu* refuses to offer clear narrative or visual hierarchies. Instead, the film juxtaposes archival fragments, ritual gestures, and contemporary images that resist interpretive closure, providing deliberate indeterminacy which prevents me from occupying a position of mastery over the material, thus withholding the comfort of comprehension traditionally associated with colonial documentation. Fluctuation between testimony and performance, fact and myth, transforms opacity into a colonial strategy: ambiguity becomes a space of ethical encounter where meaning is not extracted but negotiated. This formal uncertainty—fragmented sound, elliptical editing, layered voice-over—questions the

authority of both the camera and the spectator, situating ambiguity as a mode of resistance to the extractive gaze.

In *Aphasia*, controlled ambiguity operates through the interplay of speech and silence, performance and documentation. The film's fragmented narrative structure—intercutting archival material, dance, and textual recitation—produces a condition of partial intelligibility that mirrors the very experience of aphasia: the inability to fully articulate trauma within dominant linguistic frameworks. Rather than clarifying its historical references, what I see and hear intentionally obscure them, allowing images and gestures to speak through repetition, rhythm, and interruption. This ambiguity refuses representational transparency, foregrounding the fractures of memory and the instability of testimony. It becomes an ethical stance: a refusal to aestheticise violence or to claim a complete understanding of the colonial and patriarchal systems it invokes. Ambiguity that the artist is controlling here is not confusion but precision—a form of articulation through fragmentation.

In *Don't Take It Personally* a tension between intimacy and distance, confession and performance, provides the same result. The film oscillates between the personal and the political, between vulnerability and critique, using self-reflexive narration and performative gestures to unsettle my expectations of sincerity. Ambiguity is maintained through tonal shifts—irony, humour, self-doubt—that prevent the film from being read as either purely autobiographical or purely analytical. This strategic instability exposes the mechanisms of representation itself: how identity, emotion, and authorship are constructed within mediated space. By refusing to resolve these contradictions, *Don't Take It Personally* transforms ambiguity into a critical tool, one that reveals how self-expression can both reproduce and subvert structures of control.

Fragmented narrative, poetic montage, and sensory dissonance simultaneously dislocate ethnographic observation, undermining the documentary's claim to truth. Archival material, choreographed movement, and sonic layering replace expository narration, transforming what might appear as cultural documentation into an affective and self-reflexive experience. By refusing to clarify its stance or to distinguish fact from fiction, *Ubundu* disorients my interpretive habits and repositions the act of looking as an ethical question, thus operating within, but also against, the documentary genre—using its visual grammar to expose and unsettle the colonial epistemologies embedded within it.

Aphasia, with its hybridity, disrupts genre conventions by intertwining performance art, documentary, and essay film into a form that resists any classification. Its structure avoids linear narration, relying instead on repetition, gesture, and sound to convey meaning. It borrows elements of testimonial cinema yet undermines their coherence, replacing the expected narrative of trauma and recovery with fragmented speech, bodily rhythm, and silence. I find myself in an uncomfortable situation, unable to refuse emotional resolution or historical transparency, exposed to a transforming documentary realism that is turned into a poetic, fractured mode of address. The destabilisation of genre becomes a political act. By dismantling the frameworks of visibility through which trauma and identity are usually represented, the film asserts the necessity of opacity as a mode of resistance.

The distinctions between the personal essay film, performance video, and political critique, employing irony and self-reflexivity, are fully collapsing in *Don't Take It Personally*. Its intimate address—apparently confessional—quickly reveals itself as constructed and performative, playing with the aesthetics of sincerity that often characterise

2 Freud introduced *Deckerinnerung* in his 1899 essay *Über Deckerinnerungen* to describe how the mind preserves trauma not through direct recall but through displacement and substitution. Rather than remembering a painful event, the psyche recalls a benign image or episode that “screens” the original experience, maintaining repression while keeping its trace active. The screen memory thus exemplifies Freud’s model of the unconscious as dynamic and layered, where concealment and preservation coexist. Later psychoanalytic thinkers, including Vladimir Granoff, deepened this idea emphasising that *decken* implies not simply hiding but covering over—“as with a lid”—so that the *Deckerinnerung* becomes a “memory-lid” (*souvenir-couvercle*): a memory that protects the subject from psychic overflow by sealing trauma beneath an apparently harmless surface.

autobiographical or feminist video art. The oscillation between humour and gravity, revelation and withholding, generates an ambivalent tone that evades categorisation. Through the formal instability and absence of a single register—whether personal narrative, documentary testimony, or conceptual performance—*Don't Take It Personally* exposes the fragility of both authorship and authenticity, utilising genre disruption to question how power and emotion circulate through mediated self-representation.

All these strategies—presence-as-absence, doubling and mirroring, controlled ambiguity, and the destabilisation of genre—I perceived as cinematic enactments of *Deckerinnerung*,² in which suppressed contents are transformed into form. Freud conceives *Deckerinnerung* as an

individual mechanism of repression. Yet in post-Freudian and cultural thought, this process extends beyond the psyche (Abraham and Torok, *Lécorce et le noyau*; Laplanche, *Le temps et l'autre*). Through the social frameworks of Halbwachs (*Collective Memory*) and the affective theories of Ahmed (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*), the screen memory becomes a collective machine through which memory circulates across bodies and atmospheres. As an apparatus of attunement after fracture and shock, mediating between concealment and recognition, screen memory allows one to sense what cannot be directly recalled yet continues to resonate beneath any representation. While Freud conceived *Deckerinnerung* as an individual psychic mechanism—a process in which an innocuous recollection conceals and preserves a repressed trauma—the same logic of covering and displacement, more than a century after he delved into hidden aspects of human behaviour, extends into the collective domain. The collective *Deckerinnerung* thus names not forgetting but a mode of attunement—an affective calibration to what cannot be entirely recalled with structures becoming visible as formal fractures and controlled ambiguities, where the image itself operates as a shared psychic screen: a space in which collective history returns obliquely, perceived not as narrative resolution but as an aftershock that continues to resonate.

Finally, the formal discontinuities of *Ubundu*, *Aphasia*, and *Don't Take It Personally*—elliptical editing, unstable voice, repetition, and fragmentation—shade or rupture meaning while performing the psychic act of covering. The shock these films produce arises not from spectacle but from recognition—an affective jolt provoked by what remains unseen yet insistently felt. I experience the films’ fractures as interruptions of continuity, moments when the image or voice falters, revealing the tension between exposure and concealment. These ruptures correspond to the “stain upon thought” that Granoff associated with the covering act: the trace of repression that cannot be erased, transforming ambiguity into the relational and ethical structures.

Hence, when viewed through the lens of *Deckerinnerung*, the experiences of fracture and shock in *Ubundu*, *Aphasia*, and *Don't Take It Personally* are not merely symptoms of indeterminacy but rather deliberate strategies for mediation and attunement. They stage the psychic process of remembering by covering and translating repression into rhythm, fragmentation, and form. What is concealed remains active, pressing against the surface of the image—reminding me that every act of representation is also an act of protection, and that to see truly is sometimes to see through the screen of concealment itself. And

just as the seismograph's needle never ceases to quiver after the tremor subsides, so the text itself begins to vibrate with what it cannot contain. Clarice Lispector introduced this with her prose—not as illustration, but as continuation of the pulse. Her silences became syntax; in her rhythm, repression resonated. From the shock that jarred my perception, to the vibration that upheld it, and finally to attunement—the

Vejo que nunca te disse como escuto música – apoio de leve a mão na eletrola e a mão vibra espraiando ondas pelo corpo todo: assim ouço a eletricidade da vibração, substrato último no domínioda realidade, e o mundo treme nas minhas mãos.

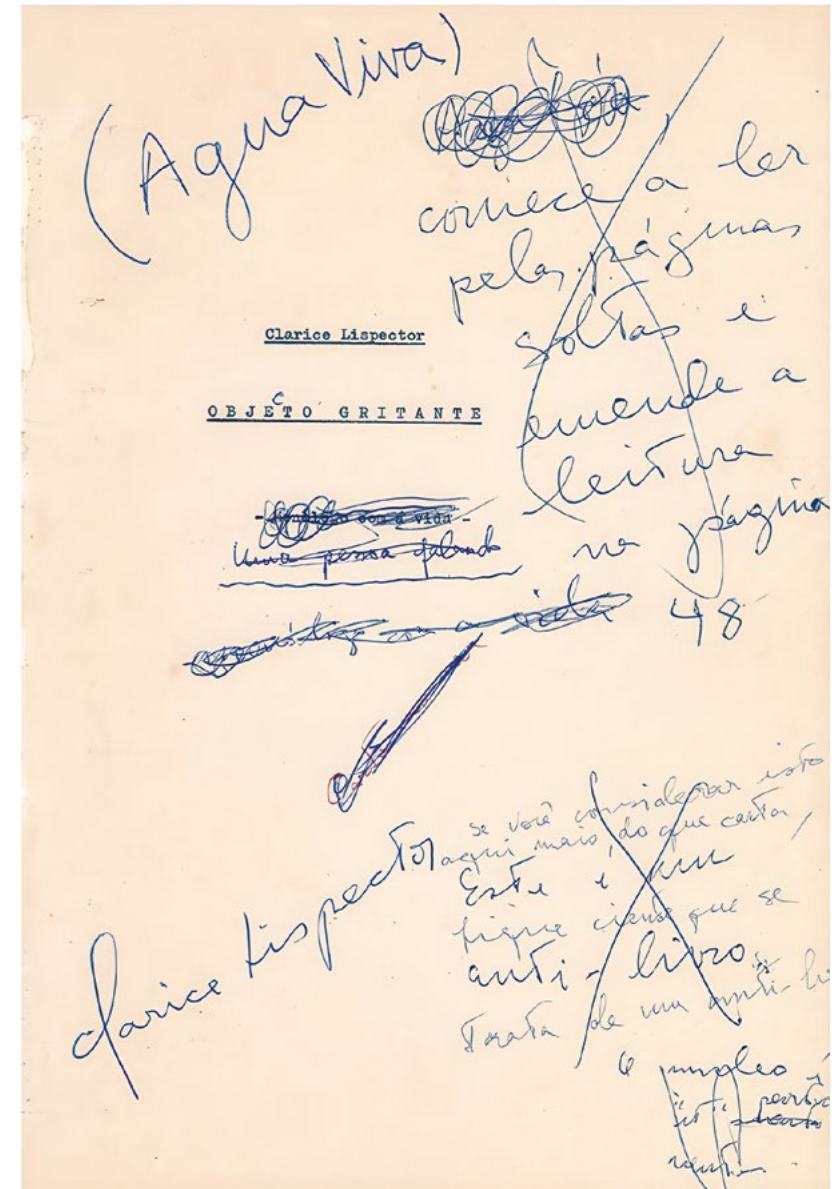
E eis que percebo que quero para mim o substrato vibrante da palavra repetida em canto gregoriano. Estou consciente de que tudo o que sei não posso dizer, só sei pintando ou pronunciando sílabas cegas de sentido. E se tenho aqui que usar-te palavras, elas têm que fazer um sentido quase que só corpóreo, estou em luta com a vibração última. Para te dizer o meu substrato faço uma frase de palavras feitas apenas dos instantes-já.

Dentro da caverna obscura tremeluzem pendurados os ratos com asas em forma de cruz dos morcegos. Vejo aranhas penugentas e negras. Ratos e ratazanas correm espantados pelo chão e pelas paredes. Entre as pedras o escorpião. Caranguejos, iguais a eles mesmos desde a pré-história, através de mortes e nascimentos, pareceriam bestas ameaçadoras se fossem do tamanho de um homem. Baratas velhas se arrastam na penumbra. E tudo isso sou eu.

I see that I've never told you how I listen to music—I gently rest my hand on the record player and my hand vibrates, sending waves through my whole body: and so I listen to the electricity of the vibrations, the last substratum of reality's realm, and the world trembles inside my hands.

And so I realize that I want the vibrating substratum of the repeated word sung in Gregorian chant. I'm aware that I can't say everything I know, I only know when painting or pronouncing, syllables blind of meaning. And if here I must use words, they must bear an almost merely bodily meaning. I'm struggling with the last vibration. To tell you of my substratum I make a sentence of words made only from instants-now.

Inside the dark cave glimmer the hanging rats with the cruciform wings of bats. I see downy and black spiders. Mice and rats run frightened along the ground and up the walls. Between the rocks the scorpion. Crabs, just like themselves since prehistory, through deaths and births, would look like threatening beasts if they were the size of a man. Old cockroaches crawl in the murky light. And all of this is me.



Clarice Lispector (2019). *Água viva* (P. K. Vasquez, Ed. & Pref.). Rio de Janeiro: Rocco Digital.

subtle act of listening to what remains trembling beneath meaning—I discovered my experience.

If shock is the instant of rupture—the shattering that breaks the surface of experience—then vibration is its afterlife, the subtle movement that continues once the impact has already passed. The needle of the seismograph does not stop when the tremor ends; it keeps tracing the invisible waves that follow, recording what cannot be seen but still insists. This is the territory where Jureša's experimental cinema and Lispector's prose converge: both linger in the vacillation that remains after the fracture and shock, in that trembling continuity where meaning falters but life persists. Freud's *Deckerinnerung* described the covering of trauma as a kind of psychic closure—a surface that both conceals and preserves what lies beneath. In the vibration that trembles along that surface, I sense the energy of what is repressed still moving. Vibration is therefore not the opposite of repression but its echo: the body of the unsaid, the aftersound of what the image cannot articulate. Clarice Lispector's writing lives entirely within this tremor. Her sentences shiver under the pressure of what they cannot hold. In *Água Viva*, every line is a pulse, every pause a contraction of sense against its own dissolution. Language there does not describe fracture and shock—it vibrates with them. The sentence itself becomes a seismographic line, recording the unsteady pulse of consciousness as it touches the world.

In *Aphasia*, this vibration takes corporeal form. It is in the performer's breath, in the stammer of voice and gesture that registers trauma as rhythm rather than representation. The unseen photograph—the absent image of violence—reverberates as sound, as a vibration of silence that can be felt but not possessed. *Ubundu* translates this same vibration into a sonic field: its layers of ambient noise, animal cries, and human voices bleed into one another until perception trembles. The okapi's body, half-visible, half-concealed, becomes the skin of the seismograph, sensitive to every pressure of history that moves across it. *Don't Take It Personally* transforms vibration into irony and echo—the rhythm of repetition that dislodges sincerity, making the affect itself oscillate between exposure and protection.

Vibration is not resolution. It is the persistence of the unresolved. To feel vibration is to remain close to the wound without reopening it—to let the trauma continue to move without forcing it into narrative form. The vibration's ethics lie in its refusal of closure: it allows me to stay attuned to what exceeds comprehension, to listen rather than explain. It is the hum of collective *Deckerinnerung*, the faint frequency through which a shared memory still circulates, neither entirely hidden

nor entirely revealed. In that trembling zone between concealment and recognition, between shock and meaning, art becomes a living instrument of attunement. This medium does not represent trauma but vibrates with its hereafter, keeping the broken world in motion.

If vibration is the movement that follows impact, fracture is its visible anatomy—the mark where the surface gives way, where vibration leaves a trace. Fracture is shock made legible. It is the line that the seismograph draws, the break that does not simply divide but reveals the material's inner structure. In *Deckerinnerung*, repression produces such a fracture within consciousness: a fault line between what is remembered and what is covered. In Lispector's writing, this same fault runs through language itself—words that collapse under their own weight, syntax that splits open to expose the naked pulse of thought. What breaks is also what allows the world to be felt.

Fracture in Jureša's work is not a narrative device but a mode of perception. *Aphasia* opens within a gap—the absence of a photograph that structures the entire film. Around this void, every image trembles, every gesture becomes an attempt to speak across a break that cannot be closed. The performer's fragmented speech and the film's disjointed editing do not signify loss; they make it present. Fracture becomes a rhythm, the pulse of a damaged syntax that refuses the comfort of coherence. *Ubundu* enacts fracture as historical tension: the colonial zoo as a living scar where past and present, human and animal, observer and observed, coexist in a single, split frame. The okapi's enclosure becomes the wound of history made visible—violence petrified into architecture. In *Don't Take It Personally*, fracture occurs at the level of tone and authorship: sincerity and irony collide, confession fractures into performance, intimacy into distance. The voice keeps breaking, as if unable to find a stable pitch. What I hear is the fracture of subjectivity under the pressure of representation.

To inhabit fracture is to dwell within instability, to accept that coherence itself may be complicit with violence. As Lispector understood, language breaks not because it fails but because it feels too much. The sentence must shatter to survive its own intensity. Similarly, Jureša's fractured forms are not ruins of narrative but architectures of sensitivity—they show how art can register shock without monumentalising it, transforming shock into visibility without turning it into spectacle. It is the site where the invisible becomes perceptible, where vibration acquires shape. Every cut, every pause, every discontinuity is an ethical decision: to represent violence only as far as form can bear it, and no further. Fracture, then, is not destruction but exposure—a way of revealing

the tensile strength of what remains. It is the body of shock, the place where trauma takes form as rhythm, as silence, as the delicate geometry of survival.

If vibration is what endures after shock and fractures the visible contour of that endurance, then attunement is the act of staying with the tremor until it becomes relation. It is the moment when vibration ceases to be only an echo of trauma and begins to resonate as a shared frequency. Where shock isolates, attunement reconnects; it turns the solitary seismograph into a chorus of sensors, each registering the same vibration in a different key. This is not harmony in the traditional sense but coexistence through trembling—a collective adjustment to the instability of the world. Attunement begins where comprehension fails. It is a practice of listening rather than knowing, of leaning into the aftershocks rather than smoothing them away. If *Deckerinnerung* conceals and vibration reveals, attunement transforms that oscillation into care. In psychoanalytic terms, it might be described as the work of *Nachträglichkeit*—Freud’s “afterwardness”—the belated process by which meaning forms retroactively through repetition and re-feeling, a form of repair that does not restore what was broken but learns to live within the break, to hear its resonance as the possibility of relation.

In Jureša’s work, attunement unfolds across images, sounds, and gestures that refuse closure. *Aphasia* does not end by resolving its silence; it ends by amplifying it, turning silence into a space of listening. The performer’s voice, fractured and incomplete, invites me to listen not for words but for breath—the minimal vibration that still connects one body to another. *Ubundu* offers a different kind of attunement: the recognition that history itself vibrates through the present. The film’s sonic textures—ambient noises, animal calls, echoes of human speech—form a collective register of coexisting lives, a reminder that colonial time has not passed but reverberates within contemporary institutions and languages. In *Don’t Take It Personally*, attunement manifests as ironic tenderness: the interchange between confession and performance becomes a way of testing proximity. The film’s refusal of a stable tone teaches me that empathy cannot be forced; it can only be tuned, like an instrument, through rhythm, pause, and response.

Attunement is thus fully political. It asks how I might inhabit a world fractured by violence without reproducing its fractures. This question converges in Jureša’s practice, where the cinematic surface functions as a collective sensorium—an instrument through which I perceive the faint hum of historical pain and the potential for its transformation.

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Art that Conspires
– Three-or-So Footnotes on
*Don't Take It Personally*¹

(1) There it was, uttered offhandedly somewhere in the middle of a theatre play, as if it were the most obvious and banal thing to say that art should not depict but connect. It came abruptly, just as though mistakenly implanted from another script into the piece that felt like an all too real, all too familiar, all too painful outcry against the growing fascism overtaking the country and much of the world at present. The sentence caught me off guard, precisely at the point I had to briefly pause from the unfolding performance—a pause long enough to take a deep breath without thinking, without looking, without listening—as the weight of the world took the best of me at that point, no matter how stunning a theatre piece it was. Strangely, the rather gently pronounced sentence in question then gripped me violently like a chokehold, though gone it was as fast as it had seized me. Or was it?

Ever since then, the verb that I so unproblematically translated as to connect—from the Slovak word *spoločovať*, for the play was in Slovak language—has troubled me. So I looked it up, resigned to the fact that I've lived away from my mother tongue for too long to understand it fully in all its folds. And indeed, the word can mean to socialize. It can imply collaboration, too. Yet it can also denote plotting a crime with others, outlining the pathways for building

¹ This text is based on the introductory remarks I delivered during the eponymously titled conversation with artists Jelena Jureša and Aernout Mik, held on 24 November 2024, at the finissage of their exhibition *Run-Through* at *kunstencentrum nona* in Mechelen. In its written form, the text seeks to retain to the extent possible the modality of personal impassionate speech and direct address to the audience, in which it was delivered.

alliances in pursuit of a political goal judged and punished as illegal by powers that be. In its origin, this somewhat outdated and poetically licensed word changes its meaning with the context from which it emerges. So let's go back to the context.

² See Martin M. Šimečka, *Príhody tuláka po Slovensku* (Adventures of a Wanderer in Slovakia) (Bratislava: N Press, 2022) and its dramatization titled *Tulák* (Wanderer), 2023 by director Juraj Nvota and dramaturg Andrea Domeová in Astorka Korzo '90 in Bratislava.

The performance was a dramatization of a travelogue;² I know, not really the stuff of the theatre, but then, there is nothing standard in and about the world in societal and ecological breakdown we are living through. And a travelogue might be a way, well, to connect back and forth between the lifeworld and the space of art in anomie. Consider this: Martin M. Šimečka, writer and prominent dissident during the Communist regime and to an extent

again today, under the reign of the horrors of illiberal democracy, sets out in the summer of 2022 to go on foot through a vast Slovak forest. Needing to walk off his frustration and the sense of helplessness about the war in neighboring Ukraine and many other places across the globe, he follows the “red trail”; yes, the Slovak National Uprising Heroes trail alongside which partisans fought the fascist forces from outside and in the country during the Second World War. Driven by the longing to meet ordinary people on this sprawling graveyard, so as to learn from them against the backdrop of the lauded battlefield for freedom their reasons for the terrifying slide into reaction of late, the author wanders and wonders. Navigating the happenstance for over a month, he meets the locals and shares in their welcome. He listens to their stories of anger and disenchantment and fear, be it for unbearable cost of living, nostalgia for the past, disdain for the west, dislike of the elites (artists

and other intellectuals included, I take it), and the ongoing slap-in-the-face insults by the oligarchs “occupying the territory” with their vulgar castles and fenced-off hunting grounds that scar the nature “with the same brutality with which they rob the society.”³

A travelogue so conceived, I hazard, is an act of gathering from within the lived experience the fundamental problems of the political

present, as it attempts to condense into words the shared human experience that has led to contemporary conjunction. It thinks about and names things, supposingly, the way they are. Yet if this hunger for movement and for freedom is to entwine physical wandering with the

³ See Dennik N, “Príhody tuláka po Slovensku” (“Adventures of the Wanderer through Slovakia”), 30 July 2022, <https://dennikn.sk/2951406/prihody-tulaka-po-slovensku-mar-tin-simecka-2023/>. Translation mine.

inner itinerant that seeks if not the meaning of life then a possibility of livable life against and in spite of the death machine of the present, it must concurrently imagine how things could be otherwise and then enact the imagined into here and now, as if it were possible.⁴ Hence the abrupt jolt that shook me when a thought on and of art interrupted the recounting of the journey. Nearly intangible yet immensely potent, it made itself known suddenly as a spectral recall of a possibility—a proposition even—against the current condition of impossibility. It, too, emerged from a conversation with the author while on the road, albeit this time a conversation taking place in a dream. In it, the wanderer happens upon his old friend and fellow dissident, late Dominik Tatarka.⁵ Tatarka tells a story of his clash about the role of art with a prominent writer of socialist realism. Against the position that art's obligation is to portray the class struggle, Tatarka posits that art under totalitarianism is not meant to represent but instead to engage in the critical act of—and here I offer the said word a new lease on life—conspiracy. Complicit with the underclass and their yearning for justice and equality, art is to join in the fight against powers that be, and concomitantly in the fight for being together otherwise in spite of them. Art, thus, made for and with the people. Art that moves, like the emotion it carries. Art that involves itself as unifying force based in commitment to one another and to truth. Art as a space for resistance and re-existence.⁶ Art that does not depict but art that conspires.

Now that I think about this imaginary dialog coming as a dream, might it be that it once really took place between the two writers forcefully assigned to the outskirts of public life for their radical anti-authoritarian stance?⁷ We might never truly know. Yet this wandering between reality and fiction; this to and fro between one world and the next; this tapping into hidden places elsewhere and elsewhere that hold the reserve of not just critique but of creativity and empowerment available for borrowing—this is how art conspires. This is how it nourishes and is nourished

⁴ I paraphrase here the statement about aesthetico-political practices of “thinking how things are, imagining how things could be otherwise, and then enacting—living—the imagined, as if it were possible,” which has been a central tenet of BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht, which I had a honor to work with as its founding director for the last 25 years.

⁵ This imaginary conversation is part of the theater dramatization of the travelogue. Dominik Tatarka (1913–1989) was one of the most important Slovak fiction writers, a pivotal dissident figure in the 1970s and the 1980s. An outspoken opponent of Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia and a signatory of Charter 77, he was banned from publishing and from public life.

⁶ I borrow the notion of “re-existence” from artist and writer Adolfo Albán Achinte.

⁷ In fact, the conversation that appears in a dream is a citation from Tatarka's collection titled *Navrávačky*, edited by Šimečka and published in 1986, which mentions this disputation with the ideas of socialist realism author, journalist, educator, and Communist politician Peter Jilemnický (1901–1949).

in reciprocity, carrying with itself the pounding sensation that shares in its rhythm the feeling that something else than what we already know—let’s call it livable life in common, and thus a life with agency to shape it with others in struggle, across difference and against all odds—can be made possible.

(2) Standing in front of Jelena Jureša’s *Don’t Take It Personally* (2024) for the first time, there, somewhere in the middle of the film within the installation, when a travelogue breaks down into another thrum, I experience the very same sensation. The travelogue this time is a fast-paced, loud, and disturbing ride through various images of artworks in the collections in (mostly) Belgium and the Netherlands. They seem to have been brought together by blatant colonial greed and unbounded sense of western superiority, no matter how much their holders would want us believe otherwise, evidencing their position with, you know, the arguments about art history, modernity, civilization, masterpieces, artistic quality, and so on. Thankfully, after this overwhelming parade of what comes across as beautified shame collaged to the monumental sound of elaborate symphony, there comes a much humbler, propositional scene. Set as a rehearsal—a performance, if you will, rather than staging of any sorts—it appears as both provisional and speculative on one hand, yet immensely urgent on the other. In the company of two musicians playing in the studio, a dancer-narrator, tap dancing on what looks like a makeshift stage, improvises through her movement and spoken word a relation to the world based in the yearning for justice and for truth; something that

8 Dubravka Ugrešić (1949–2023) was a Yugoslav-Croatian writer. Due to her anti-war and anti-nationalist stand, especially from the outbreak of the war in former Yugoslavia, she lived abroad from 1993, and in the Netherlands from 1996 onwards. In the work, two excerpts are recited from Ugrešić’s essay collection *The Age of Skin* (2020).

the present day hegemony deems intolerable. The piece is driven by writer Dubravka Ugrešić’s⁸ text, whose words are recited to the rhythmic sound of feet striking the floor along the gentle music line, bringing to the fore artistic forms and political positions exiled to, again, the fringes of public life considered worthy by powers that be. What takes place before me feels like an aesthetic act of reclamation of not just dissenting beliefs but of dignity with the head held high against the regime’s desire for majority to bend the knee. I actually do not catch all words, for they become one with the

pulsating sound that is there not so much to be heard but rather to be felt. Remembering Ugrešić’s feminist critique of nationalism from

recent past, the composition brings back to mind much of what she stood against:

*The evil unleashed by wars ... nationalism that has become so pleasant and irresistibly attractive for the masses ... for it serves as an ideological refuge for those who do not have anything else ... excluding those who don't belong to "us" because "we" said so.*⁹

Speaking of the haveless of justice and freedom and dignity and solidarity, this is what Ugrešić once said, too:

The word nationalism is just a euphemism.

*The correct term is fascism.*¹⁰

I happen to think about the distinction between nationalism and fascism often; not the least because from my childhood I carry with me the residue of whispered conversations about the dangers of pointing out the enemy from outside the community, which at a critical point of societal breakdown expanded with the enemy from within. I wonder how accurate a take on the morphing of nationalism into fascism this might be for how to make sense of our own times, but the true emphasis of this reminiscing thought is on the notion of community. This memory catches up with me once again in the exhibition, for to get to Jureša’s *Don’t Take It Personally*, one has to navigate through a video work by artist Aernout Mik, titled *Communitas* (2010). I know the work well, I think—I wrote about it more than once—but nonetheless, as is Mik’s way to physically coopt the viewer into his enveloping installations, it holds me in its grips for long enough so that I discover in it a different piece than what I remembered.

The work is filmed in a high rise in the center of Warsaw, a Stalinist empire style Palace of Culture and Science built in 1955 as a gift of Soviet Russia to the people of Poland. The building’s overpowering viscera, of which Mik offers grand views, are roamed by hordes of people in seemingly dissonant, disorganized flows, as if prompted to life by an anticipation of something new emerging from unbearable capitalist crises. Stay watching longer, and you will see ongoing formations within the seemingly formless mass. The scenes are intensely familiar in this age of global agoraphilia¹¹: occupation of the floor with teach-ins, group chanting, synchronized flag waving, speeches and microphones

9 The italicized text paraphrases Ugrešić’s statements from a 2002 interview by Svetlana Boym that I read back then. See Dubravka Ugrešić by Svetlana Boym, “The Artist’s Voice Since 1981,” *BOMB* 80/Summer 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100808203927/http://bombsite.com/issues/80/articles/2498>.

10 Ibid.

11 I use this term in the sense of late Piotr Piotrowski as the drive to enter the public space and the desire to shape public life. See Piotr Piotrowski, “Global Agoraphilia,” during *Former West: Documents, Constellations, Prospects* organized by BAK and Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin on 23 March 2013, <https://formerwest.org/DocumentsConstellationsProspects/Contributions/GlobalAgoraphilia>.

and lecterns, collective deliberation, slogans on walls (even if unintelligible), raising banners in unity. As the scenes morph from one into another, organically and spontaneously, the mass begins to organize into patterns of what looks like seeding a community in becoming. There is no audio to the work; a stark contrast to the robust soundscape of people rising. Disturbed with this eerie realization, I also begin to register that something in the work starts to break. The pace slows down. Exhaustion seeps in to hit the scenes. There is stagnation that starts to show; there are more and more moments of inactivity. The rituals are still there, just somewhat tired, repeated over and over again as a dreary formula of futility, and moving in endless loops from space to space throughout the massive building. Emptied of their emancipatory gusto, the gradually fossilizing political motions seem to merely normalize meaninglessness into reality, subjugating along the way what once felt like a revolutionary spirit into the scenes of palliative care. And yet, against the background of such settling inertia, Mik insists on breaking it intermittently with brief sequences of agitation, although it remains uncertain whether these are the vistas on the possibility to revive democracy, or whether—borne of discontent, hate, and fear—they will drive the set to abandon the democratic script and slide into tyranny.

A few years back, something made me unsee these scenes of fatigue and gradual ruination of democratic infrastructure, whether material, symbolic, or emotional; a momentary lapse of reason, perhaps, conditioned by the short-lived zeitgeist that made it possible to fathom the world at the turning point facing the end of capitalism. In that historical context, *Communitas* spoke to me about the social forces directed decidedly and vigorously into the absolute democracy of the multitude.¹²

¹² I refer here to Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's *Multitude* (2004).

In today's deep and violent crises, however, the political horizon appears to be less of democracy and more of a particular conjunction of forces categorically rejecting the democratic

option and embracing instead a fascist choice as the ultimate political program to manage corporatized oligarcho-capitalism. The public space today—unlike in that illusion that the processes of community forming on streets and squares and schools and work places were reserved for the self-constituted, freedom-loving, collective progressive political subject, and not those marching behind dictators—is the vast arena populated by, to put it simply, a multiplicity of often contradictory anti-establishment social bodies. Looking at Mik's *Communitas* through this lens, the work carefully avoids to fall into the same trap of constructing

the political alongside the ideological divide between left and right. It instead seeks to comprehend whether—and if so, what—there is in common, realistically or potentially, across these. The meaning of the word *communitas*, after all, names the potential to experience intense embodied and embedded sensation of togetherness, which in radical upheavals and societal transitions can surpass, even if momentarily or just symbolically, the extant roles, hierarchies, and antagonisms.

Here, the notion of sensation is pivotal. For as the work charts the formation of the people in and through opposition to powers that be, it captures this processes not so much through straightforward ideological script but through indexing emotions, affects, feelings, moods, and passions in the collective, relational processes of political contestation and reconstitution. Contemporary populist politics have elevated affect as a key driving force, wherein individual and collective discontent, anger, fear, anxiety, sympathy, or love, among others, are primary constituents of political identities at present. Against the politics promoted by xenophobic populist passions, it is imperative to understand the need of one's involvement in that struggle over the field of emotions across the full political spectrum. Thinking with political theorist Chantal Mouffe, this must take place through the construction of “another people”¹³—another *communitas*, if you will—another “collective will” that emerges from the “mobilization of the passions in defence of equality and social justice.”¹⁴ Here, much like in that thought on and of art conspiring with the struggle; moving with and through emotion it implicitly carries; complicit with yearning for justice and equality... here it becomes imperative for art to take part in shaping the dawning life. It becomes imperative to set out on the journey to meet everyday people where they are, and share in art's rhythm the sensations that help to mobilize into life the possibility of, let's name it once again, livable life in common.

¹³ Chantal Mouffe, “The Populist Moment,” in *A New Fascism?*, ed. Susanne Pfeffer (London: Koenig Books, 2018), 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

(3) Even as I write this a year later, the emotional aftermath of watching *Don't Take It Personally* resurfaces in an empowering way, unearthing from memory the interred words of Ugrešić I thought I have not heard.

If you think you're sinking ... don't take it personally ... in this cruel world of everybody against everybody ... when everyone is expected to play along ... in the time when cruelty has crept on us slowly—not that we haven't noticed, but we have adjusted ... things have been creeping in:

no sudden apocalypse, but post-apocalypse—like ... diabetes, you don't even know you have.

Do you feel that rhythm?

Thank you for executing me ... otherwise I'd have to witness all destruction ... if you hadn't I might have born children to be under people like you or be raped and subjected to your male standards ... thank you for executing me.

A sense of emancipation in the sudden turn toward affirming death is perhaps disturbing, but what is emancipation if not liberation from fascist dictate of who may live and who must die? I am reminded of philosopher Rosi Braidotti's thinking death affirmatively as that which, somewhat paradoxically perhaps, "frees us into life."¹⁵ At stake here is a social practice of affirmative ethics mobilizing resources from within our social and environmental entwining so as to "transform pain and

suffering, notably the greatest grief of them all: death itself."¹⁶ Read along with me, aloud, if you can:

An affirmative position on death assumes that death is not the teleological destination of life, a sort of ontological magnet that propels us forward. Death is, rather, behind us. Death is the event that has always already taken place at the level of our consciousness of being mortal. As an individual occurrence, it will come in the form of the physical extinction of the body, but as event, in the sense of the awareness of finitude, of the interrupted flow of my being-there, death has always already taken place. We are all synchro-

nized with death—death is the same thing as the time of our living, in so far as we all live on borrowed time.

The time of death as event is not linear. It is both highly personal—because nobody can die in your place—and distinctly impersonal, as it is universally shared by all that lives. The time span of death is time itself, the totality of specifically-allocated time. In this respect, the question of dying is the same question as how best to live.¹⁷

Such intimate friendship with death is a way of suspending life, as it were, "not into transcendence, but rather into the radical immanence of 'just a life.'"¹⁸ It is a conscious ethico-political choice of a relational and interdependent praxis of being with others in the more-than-human cosmopolitics: a diversiform, polyvocal, multitalented, and

multipassionate joining of forces against—or better yet, once again, in spite of—the contemporary governance of terror and violence. If such a politics of re-existence recognizes the regime's lust for the subjugation of life to the power of death, it concurrently builds a parallel social, ethical, political, and ecological infrastructure.¹⁹ Neither a withdrawal nor resignation but a sustained affirmative disengagement with powers that be, it is an infrastructure undergirded with the politics of collective thinking, imagining, and living past these powers' dictatorial authority. As a location for another politics—another people, another communitas, another collective will—it comes to being pursuing both the critique of how things are and the proposition of how things could be otherwise in the new commitment to one another and to truth. If it can, and already does, take many forms, from undercommoning education and research to makeshift publications to support circles of embodied knowledges across all walks of life, at stake is the task of germinating ways of being together otherwise in a constellation driven by the ideal of a just society. Herein, the aesthetico-political praxis that is art that conspires—complicit in upholding justice, practicing of the communal, and embracing life and death in affirmation—then becomes a livable life in rehearsal. For as a training ground of sorts, it may help us learn how to hold up one another in the "here and now for as long as we can and for as much as we take,"²⁰ against all odds and in spite of everything.

¹⁹ See another key text of the dissident politics of the 1970s in Czechoslovakia, Charta 77's spokesperson and philosopher Václav Benda's *Parallel Polis* (1978). Václav Benda, "The Parallel 'Polis,'" in *Civic Freedom in Central Europe: Voices from Czechoslovakia*, eds. H. Gordon Skilling and Paul Wilson (London: Macmillan, 1991), 35–41.

²⁰ Rosi Braidotti, "Non-Fascist Ethics: Learning to Live and Die as Affirmation," 36.

Visceral Power and the Work of Breath

It was during Covid, and thanks to the invitation to an online lecture series on this very topic by someone who became a dear friend, that I began to write about breath. Amid this collective experience of the shortage and fragility of breath, I started to reflect not only on the sociality of breathing and its unequal distribution, but also on how directly our economic and political conditions shape and leave their traces on breath itself.

Covid's unequal impact across different groups was only one event in a much longer and ongoing history. With Black Lives Matter filling the streets and crying "I can't breathe!", the ongoing political dimension of breath was in front of my eyes and in my ears. And also the climate catastrophe disclosed itself as a profound disruption of the planet's breathing processes: the excessive emission of CO₂ being both the symptom and outcome of a breathless overproduction that, through heat, fires, and acidification, creates increasingly asphyxiating conditions for all living beings.

This engagement was accompanied by a personal dimension, as I am a rather breathless person myself. As a white academic, I am in a privileged position regarding the aforementioned economic and political factors and also not affected by a particular breath disease. And yet, my own agitation and its short breath seem to reproduce something of the rhythms and forces shaping a contemporary life characterized by intense work and mobility, by being a foreigner by the witnessing or direct exposure to different forms of racial violence, sexual domination and social injustice.



Jan Weenix, *Dead Swan*, 1716. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

Theoretical awareness helps, it even provides practical changes, but can it reach down to the impact of social and political entanglements with the very basic functions of the body? I therefore began to ask myself where in our breathless societies transformative experiences of breath can be found and began to look at the arts in this perspective. The videos of the Carrabing Film Collective and a choreography by Nora Chipaumire disclosed to me as attempts to regain breath and so I started to examine, but also more closely to experience them as artistic exercises in breathing under different asphyxiating conditions.

With this increased sensitivity for the dimension of breath in arts my first encounter with Jelena Jureša's work in 2024 and especially with *Aphasia* and *Don't Take It Personally* was a strong experience of these works as further attempts to reclaim breath under conditions of violence and injustice. Using the power of dance and choreography and the visceral impacts of film both works appeared to me as specifically linking the possibility of breath also to the power of language and voicing.

Breath, in fact, carries not only oxygen or carbon dioxide, but also sound and words. It marks the intersection of the bodily and the symbolic, undermining any strict dualism between them. Harmful experiences can take one's breath away just as they can render one speechless. "Aphasia" names precisely a breakdown of expression—the silence or the impossibility of adequate speech in the face of injustice or trauma, by those complicit, but also by those who suffer under its violence.

Not only *Aphasia* itself, but also *Don't Take It Personally*, although very different in texture, are attempts to break this silence: We see a journalist and a dancer raising their voices against violence. But we also see them in different affective states (in the case of the journalist this happens also through her alter ego dancer). They are not just speaking, they are trying to find their own voice.

In this process, both films unfold toward scenes in which speech and movement stops and we see and hear the figures breathing. These moments happen after intense dance sequences. And yet, they are not just moments of rest, but, in a way, moments of another intensity. I experienced them as enacting a 'sea-change' in breath, a 'breath-change' so to speak.

In discussing this reading with others, I encountered different takes on these scenes, some of which experienced them as quite dark. For a (breathless) viewer like me, however, these scenes feel as moments where breath starts to be reclaimed. In this sense I see the films as complex choreographies tackling the impacts of violent cultures, but

also sharing a somatic response to them and I am particularly interested in understanding these moments better and how they become possible.

Visceral Power

Artistic interventions like Jureša's respond to a world where the effects of political and economic power are themselves becoming increasingly visceral, affecting even the most basic and intimate dimensions of embodied existence. The toxic legacies of fossil capitalism and its cheap, restless production, penetrate deeply into the tissues of human and more-than-human bodies, rendering them increasingly vulnerable and sick.

Theorists such as Achille Mbembe, Jasbir Puar, and Elizabeth Povinelli have given compelling analyses of contemporary biopolitical formations such as border regimes, targeted debilitation of populations and groups or processes of resettlement and ethnic cleansing of indigenous communities. If also the legacies of a colonial and militarized European history operate increasingly on a visceral register, forms of social domination like racism, sexism or classism have done this ever since. But when they no longer operate through codified ideologies, they persist even more intensively in embodied practices, affective economies, and modes of exposure that inscribe and reproduce inequality directly in the lived experience.

There is therefore a viscosity of power supplementing the 'official' institutional and legal order. A form of body politics that for some groups undermines the very possibility of engaging politically. Political theory has neglected this dimension, mostly addressing supposedly healthy individuals, unmarked by gender, class or race. And the history of arts, too, had its share, masking structural violence by shaping representations of bodies largely insulated from the histories of domination and violence that underwrite modern Western societies.

More than political theory art, however, has also addressed the visceral dimensions of existence, in rituals, but also in Greek tragedy or Christian art. Up to contemporary art it has depicted harm, pain and even violence not simply to disguise and transfigure them, but to the contrary to expose and work through them. Art, to borrow a term that Gilles Deleuze uses to describe literature, has operated from and towards "a delicate health" sustaining it against the "dominant or substantial health" of the structures and groups in power.

Jelena Jureša's work belongs to this artistic legacy, by exposing the violent and complicit dimensions of modern European (art) histories and following them into the bodily traces they leave, as also the video-installations of Aernout Mik do, with whom her films were showed together in the exhibition "Run-Through" at Kunsthal Mechelen in 2024. Between Jureša's films, in which sound and voice play a crucial role, and Mik's silent installations, an intriguing 'dialogue' emerged. Their shared concern with the embodied dimensions of political and aesthetic regimes is enacted in different ways. Mik captures them through situations of heightened ambivalence, where violence looms large yet is unsettled by gestures that evade the given frame. His installations show the cracks in a supposedly given order, the "lines of flight" (to say it with Deleuze) that evade control as well as intentionality, and open up on a bodily, gestural level.



Aernout Mik & Boris Charmatz, *Daytime Movements* (2016), courtesy of the artists.

Jureša's films are more personal, in this regard. They show figures, who try to tackle and name the displaced violence of European political and aesthetic history and part of the films unfolds around this process of voicing. It is not a triumphant or heroic process, as the figures are in a marginal position, but it is a process that nevertheless makes a difference in the visceral embodied impact of the social power as the figures try to disentangle from it.

Compared to the choreographic and performing work of Ligia Lewis, that with a forceful precision is addressing and dissecting racist pleasures and erasures in the European colonial legacy and its politics of representation, Jureša's work is still operating within the order

of representation. Lewis' choreographies engage in a poetics of (im)possible embodied resistance through the deconstruction and exhaustion of Western artistic genres and ideals, and through a radical refusal of their aesthetics of visibility. Her works move within the institutions of Western culture, yet remain fugitive in relation to them, reconnecting with archives of resistance withdrawn from theatrical or museal display.



Ligia Lewis, *Still Not Still* (2021) (c) Moritz Freudenberg, courtesy of the artist.

Jureša's work does not evade the order of visibility, it works with it, showing its violence, while also trying to display change in it. This is why with the two figures we also experience a complex process of dealing and confronting this violence and of encountering the traces this violence has left in them. In the moment this process reaches down to the visceral dimensions of these violent inscriptions, even within the register or representation, the scene retains—for a while—something hidden.

Breathing Matters

If the viscosity of power can affect in many different ways and more or less directly different parts of the body, its impact is always also a matter of breath. There is a materiality of power that affects not only the behaviour, but also the bodily and affective integrity of individuals and groups. And this materiality leaves a trace on breath, not only because breath has the same extension of life. Breath is movement and space at the same time and one of the visceral ways in which bodies are

in exchange with the world: literally have the world in themselves and extend beyond their skins. Through breath bodies inhale the necessary oxygen, but also toxins, with breath they exhale carbon dioxide, mixed with their own temperature, smell, health or sickness.

The volume of breath speaks about the space bodies inhabit in the world. The experience of violence, anxiety or fear have an impact on breath—they speed up the rhythm, but shorten its capacity. The etymological roots of the word *angst*—from the German for narrowness, tightness, and distress—are not merely metaphorical. Considering how anxiety constricts the breath and limits the body’s capacity to cope and move, these origins reveal themselves as strikingly literal.

If art is capable of addressing but also transforming visceral experiences then because it introduces mediation into what, on an experiential level, may appear immediate and inescapable. Art can bring experiences that are viscerally suffered to language, give them shape or movement and in doing so shares and exposes modalities of survival that can be transformative. In this “delicate” sense art might open spaces and with these political perspectives where none seemed possible.

Jelena Jureša’s films absorbed me in what I have called a “breath-change”: a transformation of the body at the very site of what seems most immediate, most intimate. To change breath is never as simple or as instantaneous as certain techniques might suggest at first glance, since it is entangled with visceral experiences that can involuntarily inscribe (or impose) themselves upon one’s innermost being. To change breath is to touch the fragile border where the voluntary yields to the elemental. And it is this border, that Jelena Jureša’s films seem to brush against.

Histories of Violence

Aphasia begins with places, representations and scenes connected with Belgian Colonialism, Austrian nationalism and antisemitism, and the Yugoslavian wars; *Don’t Take It Personally* shows details from 17th-century Dutch and Flemish paintings—portraits, still lives with dead animals, racialized depictions referencing the wealth and power generated by European colonial rule—and uses fragments of *The Age of Skin*, a collection of essays from Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić, whose work engages with the stories and (body) politics of the former Eastern Bloc. These are evidences of the violence in European history we could see in ethnological and art museums as well as the media all the time, and

that remained nevertheless for long time unaddressed and even unexperienced. Through edit and sound this material is woven into one long history of European violence and of a sensibility capable of accepting or overlooking this violence.

The opening sequences have something surreal—or more than real—, since they are meant to conjure what in this all-too visible history could remain hidden. In this sense they seem to address the sphere of the unconscious, while at the same time providing for a viewer like me a suffocating and loaded atmosphere. While watching at these scenes brings up rage and also frustration in me, they are accompanied with various “estrangement effects”: a theatrical voice-over, the animation of still lives, or musical scores that obliquely accompany things or images. The ‘strange atmosphere’ in which the films begin introduces distance towards images that might otherwise appear too familiar or even ‘natural’, maybe even to those who react negatively to them. At the same time this strange atmosphere reproduces (psychoanalytically speaking) mechanisms of denial or disavowal towards the violence displayed mimicking processes present in societies.

It is against these forceful displacements and distortions that the sequences centred in female figures intervene. In *Aphasia* we first see and hear a longue monologue by the Croatian investigative journalist Barbara Matejčić, documenting the violence of the Yugoslavian war and its afterlife through the story of Srdan Golubović, a member of the paramilitary militia Arkan’s Tigers who became a well-known trance DJ. The detailed report of the seated journalist is followed by a choreography of the dancer Ivana Jozić, dressed identically to the journalist. After an intense, almost furious sequence, Jozić brings the music to a halt, and her breath becomes audible.

In *Don’t Take It Personally* speech and movement are performed by the same person, tap-dancer Marije Nie. After the display of the Dutch and Flemish painting the second movement begins with noise music, a distorted voice-over and Nie producing sounds with her voice and a bird whistle. After she starts to tap dance in a visibly playful conversation with the live musicians Alan and Nenad Sinkauz, Nie then starts to recite again now interspersed with sequences of tap dance. The excerpt is a ghostly sequence that opens with the words “Thank you for executing me and sending me to heaven.” Originally from Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing*, the phrase is transformed by Ugrešić into a spectral ode to the perpetrators, voiced by a victim who repeatedly thanks them for various forms of violent death. Words and movements alternate, building in a crescendo that culminates in an extended, furious dance

passage. After the most intense passage, the movement come to rest, allowing space and sound for the dancer's breath.

What happens in these sequences exactly? Why and how does the breath of the figures eventually emerge?

The Work of Witnessing

Although *Aphasia* unfolds through two distinct sequences performed by two different individuals, the two sequences belong together as both figures are also dressed alike. For me as a viewer they nevertheless superimpose as I experience them one after the other. The breath moment reaches me therefore as a result both from the speech and the movement. It is not as if the dancer does, what the seated journalist didn't do (or viceversa). They engage as one embodied presence in response to the unpunished war crimes and the surrounding culture of indifference epitomized by Belgrade's techno scene: both are charged with strong affects, anger, bewilderment, and a sense of powerlessness, and both witness what happened in the war and after, in words or gestures.

The act of witnessing is, however, neither straightforward nor without risk: it can ultimately lead to becoming an echo of the very violence it seeks to expose, to reproducing it. Together with the reconstruction of the facts and the repetition of the gestures, the film displays also the struggle with the danger of becoming intricately in what they are trying to counter. This is especially visible in the choreography, where the rage of the figure becomes at time indistinguishable from the aggression it is repeating and mimicking.

It is the breath-moment for me that marks a difference. Whereas the talk of the journalist introduces me into upsetting facts I had no knowledge about, the choreography appears as an unsettling fight against them, that breaks the distance I might still keep as a spectator by very closely reproducing the rhythms, the music and the gestures of the perpetrator (and its scenes). The act of witnessing reveals here in its affective intensity, unavoidable if you come closer to the facts as the film does. But there is also something the quality of the figure's rage that makes a difference to the hatred it witnesses and eventually turns it into a force of transformation. Through this affective difference, the choreography resolves into a counter-force to the events, rather than another form of retaliation.

The act of witnessing, of recollecting, voicing and enacting the facts while trying not to fall into the aggression of the perpetrators

through one's own rage, is what makes the breath-moment also possible. It emerges as the culmination of a long and intense dance sequence, in which Jozić dances to techno beats, reproduces masculine gestures and gestures from the war, forms a gun with her hand, yet is also shaken by strong impulses that deform those gestures, gestures that are also somehow directed against the perpetrators.

Finally, she herself ends the music and stands almost still, as we hear only her breath. The breath condenses the entire process: it carries sounds of affection and rage, of exhaustion and perhaps disgust, and then gradually quiets and softens. This moment does not last long—the music soon begins again, and we no longer hear the breath. We see it only as a calm movement across the figure's back (her face remains unseen during the breath-scene) before she begins to dance once more.

The change in breath, I would say, is the result of a difficult process of working through the complex affects that both sustain and emerge within the performance. It is also the outcome of the insistent act of finally bringing the music to an end—after one failed attempt. But it is also a breath that marks a difference. Through this shift, when it becomes visible and audible, breath itself introduces a further transformation. It begins to become *delicate* in Deleuze's sense, because it does not carry the weight of triumphant liberation. Without concealing or fortifying its vulnerability, breath becomes a force capable of calming the figure who is fighting to make a difference. And it shows as a delicate force also for me, the beholder, who from the upsetting report of the journalist, the loud music and unsettling movements of the dancer is now slowed down to listen to the breath.

The breath resurfaces in the last sequence, in which the militarized and violent male gestures continue, interrupted, deformed, but also a last time intensively re-enacted. The figure stops them again and after a scream we shortly hear her breath, a delicate one. And it is maybe this delicate breath that sustains also the journalist while reconstructing the facts amidst an asphyxiating situation in which the perpetrator is still a celebrated DJ (and we see him as last in a video sequence shot with the phone by the journalist).

Sharing Breath

If *Aphasia* deals with the difficulties of raising and finding a witnessing voice in the midst of violence and indifference, *Don't Take It Personally* is concerned with the struggle of survival in these conditions. The excerpts

from Ugrešić's text address different forms of violence within the social fabric—everyday micro-aggressions that have become normalized, but also the deadly forms of violence evoked by the ghostly passage. Nie begins to deliver the text with a friendly and submissive smile. She soon breaks into frenzied laughter, abruptly cut short by the first dance sequence, as if the movements had suddenly erupted from her body. Ugrešić's words address the viscosity of power, which has penetrated "every inch of the public space" and has "slithered into every pore of life, our nostrils, the air we breathe, the water we drink".

Although the film centres on the figure of Marije Nie and the text is the utterance of an "I" addressing "them," the scene demonstrates the complex mediations and, in more explicitly form than *Aphasia*, also a collective, shared dimension. What we see first is the passage from a state of subordination, to agitation, to a state of anger and rage. Anger, we saw already with *Aphasia*, can have very different connotations, and also according to Maria Lugones, anger does not equal anger. There is the anger of those, who claim that some specific right of them has been misrecognized. This is the anger of the included, fighting for full recognition—and it can also be the anger of the right wing, claiming their entitlement to keep some privileges to the detriment of others. But there is also the anger of those who are excluded. This anger is produced not by the fact that one is not given the piece of pie one think one deserves, but results from the fact, that one's own experience and position does not have a place within what Lugones calls a given „world of sense“. The anger of the excluded can therefore be a burst against this blockage; in this—again not obvious case—it is not driven by hate, but is an act of communication, an act that addresses the other, in order to provoke a change, as Nie does.

As Lugones explains, located just at the margins of a given world of sense—and the world of the powerful, as it were—this form of anger is communicative, but not in the form of an articulated claim. Something of the enraged expression remains unintelligible, because it comes from a place of transition, it is in the process of rejecting and leaving an assigned and marginalized position within a social context. This is exactly what Ugrešić's words do, by using a submissive vocabulary to articulate a rejection of the powerful and what explains the multiple affective states the figure of Nie displays while she is talking and dancing, some of which, as in *Aphasia*, are strongly enraged.

What is peculiar in *Don't Take It Personally* is the use of quotes, of the words of others, but also of tap dance. Tap dance has colonial origins and emerged in the United States in the early 19th century, when slave

owners confiscated the percussion instruments of enslaved people, who then developed percussive dance forms to preserve their cultural identity. As the violence to which the figure is responding is not personal, but structural, her own response to it is not just individual, but accompanied by the resistant articulations of (past) others as she herself is, in fact, also a ghostly voice talking to us. Additionally, the movements and text are accompanied by live music performed by the Sinkauz brothers, who interact with and respond to Nie's gestures and sounds. Together, they compose a dynamic interplay that draws the figure and me watching them into a transformative vortex.

Dance, words, and sounds converge to set the figure in motion—a movement that is enacted by Nie, but also carries her from the suffocating experience of breathlessness to a recovery of breath, which breaks through in a peculiar way. After the most enraged dance-sequence Nie comes to rest and covers her face with her long hair. We hear a soft music with choral elements, while she reconnects with her most visceral dimension: breathing. Also in this film the breath sequence is modulated, repeating the arc of the entire performance: from suffocation, agitation, to something that did not have place there so far, a softer, more vulnerable breath, that is no longer just occupied by anxiety or anger. It emerges as though, through words and movement alike—and through the anger they provoke—the figure has worked her way into a space, however slight, that is more open.

Also here, the breath does not mark the end of the sequence, which continues after it. But it is striking that this space is gained while the figure's face is veiled with hair and remains so also when Nie starts talking and dancing again. This veil gives the figure something unintelligible and enigmatic. The hair shelters the figure while it reconnects with her visceral dimensions and conceals what is often regarded as the most distinctively human and personal: the face. In this posture, the figure seems to rejoin the realm of animality, one of the recurrent targets of European violence, as revealed in the still lives of the film's first part and in the colonial dioramas shown in *Aphasia*. This theme also resonates with another of Jelena Jureša's works, *Ubundu* (2019), which reveals how the violence inflicted on deported animals such as the okapi persists in the fascinated gazes directed at them in zoos. The covered face of Nie, not only shelters her from the gaze of the camera, but also gestures toward what in the figure is impersonal and therefore shared, which is in fact breath: the most visceral and yet connecting dimension of human and more-than-human life.

If also *Don't Take It Personally* can be seen as a struggle for breath, countering the ways in which violence and domination seek to restrict, to seize, to hold it, the film reclaims it through a multilayered choreography which interconnects different affects and people as well as different times. Fighting for and regaining breath under asphyxiating conditions of a visceral power, is a process of voicing against injustice, while working through and with affects such as fear or anger, but is exposed also as a common work to which dancer, musicians and writer contribute.

Counter-Politics of Bodies

Precisely because art can insinuate itself into bodily tissues and modulate affects and percepts, it can convey a form of embodied knowledge that rejects the controlled empathy and pity of a beholder and engages him or her into questioning one's own position in histories of violence and working through it. Art is a clinic, for Deleuze, not because it cures or restores normality, but because it opens lines of flight where a social or normative order blocks or interrupts transformation. Since this transformation is carried out through canvases and colours, through words, sounds, movements in space or on a screen, artistic mediation defies not only the supposed immediacy but also the clear boundaries of the body—and this is precisely why it can engage the viscosity of power.

This is why it is worth to reflect on the sequences of Jelena's films: the artistic encounter with the viscosity of power shows how expression, knowledge, own as well as other's voice and movement, past and present, and finally breath are entangled in this process. Countering visceral power and its violence operates on a symbolic plane, but through an affective and material dimension. Therefore breath, in both films, ultimately becomes an active agent in the process and the body proves not only receptive to violence but also integral to the process of countering it. Through sound, speech, music and movement the works do not leave the beholder on distance, but involve me in their movement. Thus, breath is not any longer just an image we look at or a sound we listen to or reflect upon, it reaches out to my breathing, as the films prove to be an exercise in collectively finding breath again.

*Moreover, the targets of this kind of warfare are not by any means singular bodies but rather great swaths of humanity adjudged worthless and superfluous, whose every organ must be specifically incapacitated in a way that affects generations to come—eyes, noses, mouths, ears, tongues, skin, bones, lungs, intestines, blood, hands, legs, alle these maimed people, paralytics and survivors, all these pulmonary diseases like pneumoconiosis, all these traces of uranium on their hair, the thousands of cases of cancer, abortions, fetal malformations, birth defects, ruptured thoraxes, dysfunctions in the nervous system—all bear witness to a terrible devastation. (Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 100)*

*Moreover, the writer as such is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and of the world. The world is the set of symptoms whose illness merges with man. Literature then appears as an enterprise of health; not that the writer would necessarily be in good health (there would be the same ambiguity here as with athleticism), but he possesses irresistible and delicate health that stems from what he has seen and heard of things too big for him, too strong for him, suffocating things whose passage exhausts him while nonetheless giving him the becomings that dominant and substantial health would render impossible. (Gilles Deleuze, *Life and Literature*, p. 228)*

*And I began to recognize a source of power within myself that comes from the knowledge that while it is most desirable not to be afraid, learning to put fear into a perspective gave me a great strength. I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. (Audre Lorde, *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action, The Cancer Journals*, p. 13)*

*What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. [...] And, of course, I am afraid—you can hear it in my voice—because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation and that always seems fraught with danger. (Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p. 14)*

Anger is a form that the passion for communication takes. It is a stirring form: an urgency wishing into being an extremely delicate possibility. Incommunicative anger expresses the state of transformation. It is a cocoon, an inward motion intent on sense making. The passion that I address at you in anger is neither really different nor separate from the passion of metamorphosis. It is in the same tonality and of the same cloth. (Maria Lugones, "Hard-to-Handle-Anger", p. 103)

To Repeat the World is to Betray It

Where Are You From?

A question asked in many tones —sometimes feigning innocence, sometimes cloaked in curiosity —but nearly always delivered with a subtle edge, a quiet suspicion. The words may vary, but the message remains:

You are not from here.

This is not truly a question. It does not seek understanding, nor does it open a path to dialogue. It functions instead as a declaration, a performance of belonging that simultaneously reminds the other of their place. It is spoken to those who are already *in*—already part of the fabric, yet never allowed to feel sewn into it. It is not the curiosity of one human reaching out to another, but the choreography of a hierarchy seeking to reassert itself.

It is not about knowing to include. But to keep out.

The question fixes the Other in place—not just geographically, but socially. It ensures that the one addressed does not forget their position on the map of power and belonging. It is a line drawn around the body.

“Where are you from?”

It is not forgetfulness that prompts the question; it is rejection.

Rejection to allow the other to simply be.

Rejection to let go of the notion that foreignness is a flaw, not a fact.

And for many, the question never expires. It echoes through generations, through skin tones and surnames, through accents and silences. The darker your skin, your hair, your eyes—the more often it arrives. Not as a search for knowledge, but as a code.

This is not an enquiry about geography.
It is a statement about race.
About borders that are not drawn on maps, but on bodies.

“Where are you from?” is not a question about *place*, but about *time*.
It asks: To which part of the history do you belong?
Are you from the now, contemporary to us?
Or are you from the past, still walking a step behind?

UBUNDU

UBUNTU is an ancient African word rooted in humanist African philosophy and can be roughly translated as “humanity to others”, or “I am because we are”. It comes from the Zulu proverb “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”, meaning “a person is a person through other people”.

It is a temporal sorting mechanism, asking not just *where* you belong, but *when*. Are you part of the present we claim as our own, or a relic of an earlier chapter—outdated, behind, other?

And like race, this question is not objective. It is constructed. It is projected. It arises not from fact, but from imagination. An imagination shaped by history, by empire. The one who asks may not realize it, but they are not seeking an origin story; they are enacting a fantasy.

Because this question has never really been about *you*.
It is about the one who asks.
It is about the need to make sense of you—to place you within a known framework, to explain your presence through the lens of their own worldview.

This question—“Where are you from?”—should not be posed *to* the stranger. It should be asked *by* the stranger.

Where am I from?
From what part of *your* imagination do I emerge?
What inherited story, what cultural anxiety, what colonial memory shapes the way you see me?

Don't you remember me?
I have always been here.

This is the heart of it: the stranger is never a complete outsider. “Where are you from?” becomes, then, less a question about identity and more a reflection of the questioner's own history. It becomes an act not of inquiry, but of projection. A colonizing gesture disguised as curiosity.

And so, the only honest, the only ethical, the only truly responsible response is:

I am not from anywhere, but you.
Don't you remember you?

The Railroad of Ugliness

First they built railroads. Then they drew borders.
Railroads and borders, two pillars of domination.

Railroads and barbed-wire fences may appear to serve opposite functions: one enables movement, the other restricts it. Yet both are instruments of the same logic—the logic of control and domination. The railroad facilitates a certain kind of mobility: the movement of goods, troops, and privileged bodies. Barbed wire halts and regulates other kinds of mobility: the movement of the poor, the racialized, the colonized. One cannot exist without the other. Mobility for some is only possible through the immobilization of others. It is no coincidence that railroads and barbed-wire fences emerged at the same time. Both were critical to the expansion of racial capitalism and imperial militarism. Both carved the modern world into zones of extraction, and exclusion, freedom and containment.

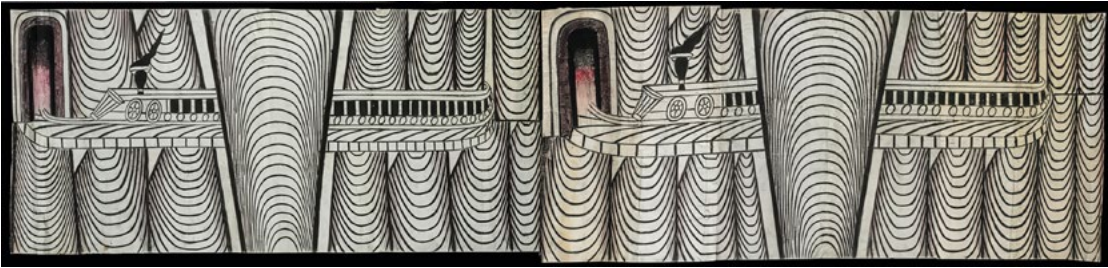


Image 1. by Martín Ramírez

Migrant workers have been essential to the construction of railroads. Chinese and Irish laborers built the American Transcontinental Railroad, while camels and workers from present-day Afghanistan contributed to building Australia's railways.

Perhaps no one better than Martín Ramírez, railroad laborer and railroad painter, has illustrated the symbiosis of railways and borders. Ramírez was born in 1895 in Mexico. As a poor young man, he crossed the border to California to work on the railroads. Like so many migrant laborers, he worked to support a family he had left behind, enduring exploitation, language barriers, and isolation. Eventually, after years of hard labor, he found himself unemployed, homeless, and institutionalized, diagnosed with mental illness. It was in psychiatric asylums that Ramírez began to draw. His work, rich with patterns drawn from Mexican folk art, returned obsessively to certain images: trains, tunnels, railroads, symbols of the world that shaped and confined his life. He died in 1963.

Colonial Prosopagnosia

A word from the Greek: *prosopon*, meaning face, and *agnosia*, meaning not knowing. Face-blindness.

A neurological condition in which the eyes function, but recognition fails.

Those who live with it can look at a face, a familiar one, even a loved one, and not know who they are seeing. The image registers.

The face does not.

Not as disorder of perception, but of power.
Of a gaze that does not see.
Because the gaze is never innocent.
It is an episteme, a way of knowing, and a way of not knowing.
It determines who is seen and who is *unseen*.

Somewhere in Plato's *Euthyphro* Socrates says:
"A thing is not seen because it is visible, but
conversely, visible because it is seen"



From the exhibition 'Molte Facce, Nessuna Razza' at the Museo Della Natura e dell'Uomo in Padova. 72 face masks were crafted by the Italian anthropologist Lidio Cipriani. He moulded facial casts on living people by force in South Africa and South Asia in 1920s. Photos by the author.

Coloniality in the prosopagnosia takes the term beyond its clinical meaning.
This is not merely a failure of neurological recognition.
It is the legacy of a colonial gaze, trained to erase from the visual field.
A prosopagnosic gaze does not simply overlook. It dismembers.
It fragments the whole into manageable, dismissible parts.
The colonial prosopagnosic gaze sees not who you are
but what you are *not*.

Un-civilized then, un-documented now
Master-less then, state-less now
fugitive then, refugee now

In a prosopagnosic society, the Other is watched but never recognized.
Visible, but *actively unseen*. This is not invisibility. It is the conscious act
of unseeing.

The homeless, the poor, the undocumented, the displaced
the worker without papers,
they move among us,
but we unsee them.

In a society afflicted with collective prosopagnosia,
Rather than seeing, we diagnose.
Rather than perceiving, we detect.

The smell of difference. The color of discomfort.
The sound of outlandishness

Prosopagnosia is not only a strategy for active unseeing but also for active unremembering. Not remembering faces that morally and ethically should be remembered is an evasion of responsibility and accountability.
The presence of the Other on this side of the border evokes a sense of the uncanny.

Border Images

Maurice Blanchot once wrote that disaster resists representation.
It escapes capture.
It cannot be wholly depicted, for we never witness its totality.

In *The Writing of the Disaster*, he binds catastrophe to the act of writing, a framework that echoes in cinema, art or the still frame of photography. Disasters defy representation because they exceed the fragile scaffolding of meaning, the language and images upon which we depend. And still, the disasters of today, from the genocide in Palestine to the migrant shipwrecks in the Mediterranean, are not past events.
Every day.
Every night.
This is why they evade articulation.
This is why they resist capture.

Representation fails, not in what it shows,
but in what it cannot show.
What we encounter is always the *after*:
boats spilling over with bodies stripped of name, of face, of singularity, reduced to mass, to package, to cargo.
And yet these images remain haunted by absence:
the forces that produced the catastrophe.
The disaster itself is always missing.
And at its core lies the border.

The border:
that line which turns land into territory,
people into migrants,
neighbors into foreigners,
color into race,
bodies into commodities.

*If I forge a life, the border forges history
If I forge a journey, the border forges the earth
Should say any asylum seeker*

The border is not only seen. It is sensed.
It is built to be felt.
It touches the skin.
It enters the lungs.
It fills the mouth.
When the drowning body opens for a final gasp of air,

what floods in is not merely water, it is the border itself.
The salt of the sea is the taste of the border.

Disasters occur, one after another.
They arrive without pause.
The question is what language we need to meet them.

If the border lives in the senses,
then we must answer with a language of the senses.
A language that not merely represent, but also creates.
A language that summons into being what was concealed.
A language that gives form to the unseen,
voice to the unspoken,
weight to the unfelt.

We need a poetic language.

Poiesis from the ancient Greek, means 'to make, to bring forth.'
Poetry, in its oldest sense, was never just ornament.
It was creation itself.
It was the act of revealing, of bringing into light
that which lay hidden in shadow.

To think poetically is to unearth the architectures of power,
to draw into visibility what is unseen.

We need a radical language.

To be radical is to go to the roots.
And imagination is the root of transformation.
We must dare to imagine a future
other than the exhausted repetition of the present.

Because to repeat the world is to betray it.

Hey You

Hey you, sitting on the shore, laughing in joy,
someone is dying in the waves.
Someone is constantly beating with his hands and legs.
On this agitated, dark, heavy sea you see
when you're drunk
with the thought of defeating your enemy,
when you wonder in vain
that you've held hands with the powerless
to bring forth better power,
when you fasten
your resolution on your belt ...
When else shall I say?
In vain someone wastes his life in waves.
Hey you, feasting at the table on the shore,
with bread on your plate, clothes on your body.
Someone from the water beckons you,
beating the heavy tide with his exhausted hands,
mouth gaping with wide open fear-filled eyes,
seeing your shadows from afar
swallowing water in that dark depth,
getting impatient minute by minute.
Treading water—
now his hands, now his legs.
Hey you,
he's watching this ancient world from afar,
crying in hope of being saved.
Hey you, watching the calm shore!
The wave beats hard on the silent shore,
falls and spreads like a drunkard, unconscious,
then recedes, shouting. From afar the voice is heard:
"Hey you!"
And the wind sounds ever sharper.
In the wind his shouts are ever louder
from close and far waters.
It resounds in our ears:
"Hey you!"

Nima Yushij (1941)

Don't Take it Personally

In October 1991, I was shot by the Laser Man. A racist. A terrorist who shot those whose faces didn't belong to his vision of Sweden. He got the nickname because he used a rifle equipped with a laser sight.

Between August 1991 and February 1992, he shot eleven people in and around Stockholm.

I was one of them.

That cold, dark Scandinavian night, the bullet bored through my right cheek,
shattered teeth, split inside my mouth.

More than ten years later. Long after I had learned to live with the fragments of the bullet still lodged deep in my bones, I received a letter from prison. In the letter, the Laser Man wrote:

'You should not take it personally'

Did I take it personally? How could I not? What else is more personal?

Bullets do not ask your name.

They do not wait to hear your story.

Yet they enter the body and make themselves personal.

Wounds are always personal

Colonial Aphasia: Listening in Dark Times

The Global North has mobilized its most advanced technologies and investing vast resources in the hope of hearing a voice from beyond the Earth. A whisper from space, an alien intelligence, a distant other. Yet, at the same time, the voices of the oppressed, the wretched of this Earth, continue to go unheard. They speak but their words are silenced or distorted, dismissed as noise rather than recognized as language.

During the Summer 2025, while the pain of Palestinians was unheard, researchers at Tel Aviv University discovered that plants express their distress and suffering through sound.

What do you hear when you listen to me? Do you hear a speech, or only a noise? In the architecture of hearing, the color of skin often determines whether a human voice is recognized as a tongue or reduced to a clanging cymbal. I speak, and yet my words pass through a filter built on racialized perception. You hear only when I say what you already wish to hear. Listening, too, has a color line.

There is a kind of deafness that is not a physiological loss but a willed refusal. A willful deafness ensures that even with fully functioning ears, some choose not to understand. My denied speech and your aphasia are not separate conditions. They are dialectically related. The more you repudiate my speaking, the more deeply entrenched your own aphasia becomes. This is the boomerang effect of colonization: what is violently silenced returns; not as the voice of the colonized alone, but as the deepening incoherence of the colonizer's own moral and political language.

They prove that colonization, I repeat, dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal. It is this result, this boomerang effect of colonization that I wanted to point out.
Aimé Césaire, *Discourses on Colonialism* (1955)

It is too dark. The term 'dark times', borrowed from the poet Bertolt Brecht, was later used by Hannah Arendt in her reflections on the crimes of Nazi Germany. Importantly, for Arendt, darkness did not refer simply to the horrors themselves—the Holocaust, the camps—but to the way those horrors were concealed, misrepresented, and justified in public discourse. Darkness descends not merely when atrocities occur, but when they are narrated as something else entirely.

Today, darkness takes new forms. Walls are built and called acts of love. Wars are launched in the name of peace. Racism is reframed as a form of care. Life is said to be protected through the very mechanisms that systemically enable premature death.

This, too, is a kind of aphasia: colonial aphasia. It is not simply the absence of speech, but a distortion of speech itself. It is a forgetting that is structured and intentional. A forgetting of histories, of violence, of complicities. But it is also a forgetting of how that forgetting was made. And in doing so, they lose their own capacity for meaningful language.

Colonial aphasia is not just a failure to listen. It is a crisis of understanding rooted in the refusal to recognize certain people as speakers at all. It is the silence that follows when speech is delegitimized by race, power, and history. And it is the darkness that settles in when even the most obvious horrors are dressed in the language of virtue.

Colonial aphasia is a political disorder and a troubled psychic space.....We need a better understanding of how occlusions of knowledge are achieved and more insight about the political, scholarly, and cognitive domains in which knowing is disabled, attention is redirected, things are renamed, and disregard is revived and sustained. At issue is both the occlusion of knowledge as a political form and “knowing” as a cognitive act.....Aphasia produces endless replacements of categories with incomprehensible associations that collapse into incommensurability.

Ann Laura Stoler, *Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France*

A civilization that cherishes its own aphasia, defends its forgetting, and aestheticizes its inability to name its violence, then its decadence is not just beginning, it is already well underway.

A Poem Under Rubbles

If I must die,
 you must live
 to tell my story
 to sell my things
 to buy a piece of cloth
 and some strings,
 (make it white with a long tail)
 so that a child, somewhere in Gaza
 while looking heaven in the eye
 awaiting his dad who left in a blaze —
 and bid no one farewell
 not even to his flesh
 not even to himself —
 sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above,
 and thinks for a moment an angel is there
 bringing back love.
 If I must die
 let it bring hope,
 let it be a story

Refaat Alareer

I am Still Alive in Spite of All

What binds the wretched of the earth?

A family is bound by blood, by the secret codes encrypted in DNA.

A community by a shared tongue, a remembered homeland, a common God.

A nation is bound by lines on a map.

But what binds the homeless man sleeping beneath the glowing ads of Barcelona to the Afghan asylum seeker whose fingerprints betray him in a biometric database?

What binds Palestinians under siege to those who drowned in the English Channel, dehumanized and legally erased?

What binds the worker with documents to the worker without?

What binds the wretched of the earth is *combat breathing*.

We live in a suffocating time.

The color line, which is always also a class line, cuts through the very air we breathe. It is drawn by the differential distribution of the right to inhale, to exist.

There are many who cannot breathe. The illegalized people packed into airless containers.

The travellers without papers who drown silently in the Mediterranean Sea. The African Americans choked under the knees of Whiteness. The children whose lungs are scorched by toxic air, poisoned by profit.

In this world, breathing has become struggle.

The atmosphere itself has been politicized, weaponized.

To breathe is no longer a biological given but a site of social conflict.

Breathing has become combat.

There is not occupation of territory, on the one hand, and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a final destruction. Under these conditions, the individual's breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing
Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*

Today, breathing is a privilege.

A privilege called white.

The English verb *to stifle* carries a double meaning: to suffocate and to silence.

Strangling and silencing are semantically entwined. To control a body's breath is also to control its voice. And this control is exercised through the slow suffocation of social air: the shrinking of rights, space, protection, and recognition.

Sovereign power, in its most intimate form, seeks to possess your breath; to regulate your inhalations, your voice, your capacity to claim space.

In Persian, the verb *dam zadan* means to breathe, but also to speak, to assert, to claim. A breath is never just air; it is a declaration.

The term *kbafeghan* captures this fusion—used in Iran to mean both suffocation and political repression.

To breathe, then, is not just to live. It is to resist the structures that make life unlivable for so many. It is to reject the conditions under which some are allowed to breathe freely while others are forced to inhale the toxicity of racism, bordering, exploitation, and silence.

To breathe, today, is a political act.

And for the damned of the earth, every breath is subversive.

Jelena Jureša reminds us that we are still alive in spite of all.

We still breathe. And each breath will be a story.

Entangled Temporalities* — *Choreography of Violence* and Performative Gestures

The
aim of this text
is not only to describe
the works, but also to shape the
conditions for their watching: the
rhythm of reading, pausing, returning,
as a choreography of attention. Just as
the exhibition display directs the
movement and distribution of the gaze,
so too does the writing here function
as dispositif: it brings closer and
farther, interrupts and continues, summons
images and withholds them. In that sense,
the “choreography of violence” is
not just the key that brings the works
together, but also the methodology
of their reading—the way to see that
violence is produced through framing,
selection and normalization, and that
the observer/reader is always in a
position of responsibility.

Instructions for viewing:

Choreography of Violence

Structural violence that has been perpetrated within the frameworks of power politics for centuries, spanning continents, is inscribed in the legacy of imperialism, colonial oppression, discrimination, and racism against others and those who are different. Reflected in long-lasting structures, it reappears and is continually redefined in different cultural and social codes, nation states, forms and manifestations. *Choreography of Violence*, Jelena Jureša’s first large solo exhibition in Croatia, presents an overview of her recent production in the area of film, video and video installation. In her work, Jelena Jureša examines the issues of identity, politics of memory and oblivion, the relationship between the observer and the observed, the representational power of the image, and, in the artist’s own words, representation of violence and violence of representation. By exploring the complex interplay between collective memory and political responsibility, Jureša questions the ways in which history is reflected and reproduced in contemporary society.

Focused on the mechanisms that frame space and time, place and identity, Jelena Jureša’s artistic practice reveals constellations of suppressed images of history and the influence of these images on everyday phenomena. Jelena’s work is marked by a deep immersion in the histories and politics of the long twentieth century, exposing the mechanisms of representation that reveal how colonialism, nationalism, racism, and capitalism remain inextricably intertwined, shaped by the politics of power of imperial heritage or patriarchy. *Choreography of Violence* thus detects a web of relationships that spans decades and traverses the spaces of the European continent, different states, political and social

* I draw on the notion of “entangled temporalities,” introduced in the eponymous essay by Françoise Vergès (*Entangled Temporalities, Cinema and Anti Colonial Feminist Education*), to frame the works of Jelena Jureša in the exhibition *Choreography of Violence*.

contexts—pointing to crises and silences while creating a visual space where the personal becomes inseparable from the political.

Counter-memory and Counter-images

Choreography of Violence creates room for counter-images, seeking to establish a dialogue that reflects social constellations, points to blind spots and omissions, and, through fissures and cracks, poses questions of memory and forgetting. They draw attention to the politics of power embedded in modes of representation—as if asking: how do societies remember, and who governs their memory?

Counter-memory denotes a practice of forming memory that is both social and political, according to T. J. Demos in *Sites of Collective Counter-Memory*; it is a practice that contradicts the dominant or official histories as written by governments and challenges mainstream of mass media and the society of the spectacle.¹ It includes memorialization—a

1 T. J. Demos, *Sites of Collective Counter Memory*, https://animate-projectsarchive.org/writing/essays/tj_demos

2 Marco Scotini, “The Government of Time and the Insurrections of Memories”, in *Politics of Memory* (Berlin: Archive Books, 2017).

collective practice of re-learning—the forgotten, suppressed and excluded histories, which becomes an act of political subjectivization. In *Politics of Memory*, Marco Scotini argues that in this way counter-memory influences positive transformation of social and political reality in the future.

Citing the past, (...) does not mean re-memorising dead languages but de-archiving the rebellious signs of official cataloguing, not so

much bringing to light the object of remembrance as that which it (with its reappearance) renders invisible or removes. In this sense it is possible to talk about politics of memory, writes Scotini.²

In the continuity of Jureša’s artistic production presented in the exhibition, *Choreography of Violence* helps us grasp the entangled histories of wars, violence, and exploitation, so that we may oppose memory to oblivion, give voice where speech is silenced, and juxtapose images of the past and the present, archives and memory, as well as contemporary female voices and gestures. In her works, examines questions of social trauma as an experience that has not been mastered, which is inscribed both in the psyche and body of the individual as well as in the unconscious of the community, while the causes of collective traumas lie much deeper in the social and cultural body. According to Shoshana Felman, particularly through the concept of the juridical unconscious,

art is positioned as a key social role by creating the potential for action where law and institutional discourses reach their limits—in other words, it opens a space in which collective trauma can be expressed and understood where the legal system and official discourses fail. In this sense, art does not serve to offer solutions or answers, nor to arrive at an ultimate truth, but rather creates a context and enables the formation of a space in which collective trauma can be rearticulated. In its potential to activate the unconscious inscribed in social structures, art can facilitate the transmission and transformation of collective memory and responsibility. To achieve this, Jelena Jureša’s work is grounded in the practices of artists as historians and archive researchers, who, as Hal Foster notes, in the practices of “artist-archivists,” attempt to make historical data, often lost or repressed, physically present.³

Jelena Jureša’s film and moving practice combines the expressive possibilities of different media to create a completely unique visual language, which, in the form of the artist’s film and film essay, encompasses performance, music, appropriating still and moving images

3 Hal Foster, “Archival impulse”, *October*, 110 (autumn, 2004), (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 3-22.

of various origins, from documentary or photographic archives, feature film or television. She employs the processes of re-mediation, as the techniques of transmitting an image from one medium to another, i.e. representation of one media by another, and these are formed in relation to referential spaces of art history and museums, as forms of preservation, re-contextualization and re-articulation.

Four Works: Poetics and the Politics of Immersion

The exhibition *Choreography of Violence* features four video works which are arranged in the large central exhibition halls of the MMSU as immersive audiovisual installations. These works create poetics and politics of images moving between the documentary and the performative, fully conquering the exhibition space. They include Jureša’s new experimental film and video-installation *Don’t Take It Personally* (2025), experimental film *Ubundu* (2019), and monumental and complex work *Aphasia* (2019)—a feature-length film essay structured in three chapters, unfolding further as a multi-channel installation that documents the eponymous multimedia performance *Aphasia, Score for Monitors* (2025). Most of these works are shown in Croatia for the first time.

The title for the exhibition *Choreography of Violence* was taken from a subtitle of an essay of mine, *Politics of Memory: Unmasking the Image of History*, published in 2019 in a catalogue accompanying Jelena Jureša's exhibition dedicated to the film installation *Aphasia* (Argos Centre for Audiovisual Arts, Brussels). In the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka, this "choreography" was multiplied: between metaphor and gesture, through language, space and time. Starting from a unique metaphor, which takes a concrete, choreographed movement as its point of departure, it simultaneously establishes, on one hand, a framework for understanding and viewing the broader exhibition as a whole, as well as orienting visitors' movement through the exhibition space. This journey—from a fragment of a single concrete movement, which becomes embedded in the whole and whose meaning flows throughout the entire exhibition space—encompasses multiple histories, the passage of time, and various geographies. It is further reflected in the use of singular and plural in language (in this case, the Croatian and English versions of the exhibition title's translation are deliberately different).

Focused on the relationship between image and world, the artist's film and video works establish a dialogue with cinematic and artistic currents, with new visual languages and means of cinematic expression that open perspectives onto contemporary aesthetic and social phenomena. They mirror social structures and inscribe interventions into the social, cultural, and media space. Through their scale and spatial installation in the gallery, they influence the viewer's subjective experience and create a sense of immersion, while the shifting of the dispositive influenced the shaping of new conditions of perception. To describe new ways of seeing, terms such as "seductive immateriality" and "mimetic enveloping" are used to characterize artists' video installations in the gallery context; these terms are characteristic of the flow of images that defines contemporary visual culture. Artists' multimedia installations transform physical spaces into environments filled with projected images, participating in the development of new audiovisual forms by creating new visual and sonic conditions in the production of subjectivity. In this sense, Alison Butler identifies a "*deictic turn*" in recent artists' moving-image production, which points to projection as an event, as well as to the aesthetics and practice of spatial modulation and transformation, the formation of subjective environments, and a particular focus on the position of the viewer, alongside the intensification and unfolding of various affects such as uncertainty, instability, or anxiety. By contributing to the displacement and destabilization

of fixed conditions of viewing, projections become ways of directing attention to the complex relations of the contemporary subject within mediatized space and time.⁴

Placing the viewer at the center of the debate on the relationship between art and politics, the French philosopher Jacques Rancière argues in *The Emancipated Spectator* that the viewer should be denied the position of a detached observer who peacefully contemplates a spectacle. The viewer stands before a phenomenon without knowing its process of production or the realities that lie behind it, Rancière argues.⁵ In this sense, he writes about theater as a place where the audience confronts itself as a collective. Similarly, confronted with images from the projector, scenes that the works of Jelena Jureša put before us, in specially created conditions for viewing within institutional exhibition spaces, we, as the audience, are simultaneously confronted here with historical reality and an artistically constructed formation.

Conceived as a dispositive that frames and directs, as a space where different perspectives and positions meet and refract, the exhibition itself develops as a visual essay. And the essay, as a privileged transition from literary writing to metalanguage, is a privileged aperture in the body of metalanguage through which the consistency of theory disperses. Building understanding is what we call exposition, Heidegger explains. It is precisely the mode of exposition—display—as the arrangement of elements and the stripping bare of the apparatus through which we describe the politics and poetics of exhibition and art gestures, that is inscribed in the conceptual and spatial practices, the artistic concept, and the dispositions of works within the exhibition choreography: their interrelations, sightlines, apertures or obscurations, the presence of gestures and bodies in motion, words and sounds that permeate the space. Balancing between dimmed spaces without sharp edges, the slow passage of time, the longer durations of films, and the time required to observe them, we are oriented toward ourselves in a space of learning, experience, and empathy.

Film in the Museum

Paraphrasing Roland Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theatre," curatorial work with film in the contexts of museums and galleries takes on something of his phenomenology of the movie theatre, that specific

⁴ Alison Butler, "A deictic turn: space and location in contemporary gallery film and video installation"; *Screen*, Vol. 51 (4); (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), 2-3.

space enveloped in darkness and a sense of immersion. For Barthes, it is precisely in the darkness of the cinema that the fascination with film manifests, while darkness, anonymity, gathering, collective presence, enclosure, and relaxed bodies characterize the experience.⁶ Leaving the

⁶ Roland Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater", in *The Rustle of Language*, (New York: Hill and Wang, New York, 1986), 346.

movie theatre, the gallery and museum as a black box adopt some of the perceptual and experiential conditions described by Barthes, such as immersion in darkness, a specific sensibility, focus on modes of perception, and the visitor's subjective experience. Moreover, in the gallery

space, film expands: it is no longer a linear projection event but a material that occupies space and the spatial arrangement of attention. Film functions within the exhibition as a kind of performative and a durational form, accessible simultaneously to multiple viewpoints, and the works are experienced, among other things, through the multiplication of sightlines and movement through space.

Within this expanded media horizon, the assumptions of the cinematic apparatus—understood as an institutional and ideological infrastructure—become critical spaces for examining conceptual and contextual determinants, focused on considering the social, cultural, media, and technological aspects; spaces for exploring media, spatial subjectivity, and resistance; technical reproduction; communication; conditions of accessibility; economy and distribution; ideology and aesthetics; while investigating the interrelations of cultural production, institutions, and audiences. In this sense, the exhibition is not a secondary surface for presenting film but a constitutive site where the film acquires a new form. Film in the gallery is not the abandonment of the cinematic experience but its rearticulation: the production of a different temporal and perceptual regime in which artistic and curatorial practices mediate what once belonged to the cinematographic apparatus. The film in the gallery is no longer understood solely as a cinematic event but as a complex dispositif. This also changes the ontological status of the film: it no longer functions exclusively as a finished product but as an articulation of material activated through the conditions of exhibiting.

As a performative node of the exhibition's dramaturgy, the events of moving images, and the protocol of the cut and trauma are inscribed in the body of the film, as well as in the exhibition space itself. In this sense, the cut is seen and felt when contemplating the space in the context of the exhibition's spatial disposition, both in the works themselves and in their installation.

The cut allows the gaze to slide from the surface into the center of the event. It enables the seam between fragments of the screen and the flow of images, in both the arrangement and visual texture of the films, to manifest as a site of projection and a site of encounter—in collective reimagination—so as to redefine the shared sensory, political, and physical (institutional) space in which we exist while watching the fragments and the wholes presented in the *Choreography of Violence*.⁷

Gallery films as part of a specific audiovisual production by artists, are situated between the institutions of cinema and the gallery, questioning their conventions and anticipating new media practices. They record their historical position between media forms, institutions, and practices, and the intricate relationships among them, through the multiplication of spatial and temporal dynamics. Emerging from traditions of experimental, avant-garde, or documentary film, they absorb experiences from cinematography and video art, forming a completely unique media form—one of fluid characteristics, shifting categories, a slippery terrain of moving images that resists fixed definitions.⁸ Today, we can also speak of a "documentary turn" in contemporary artistic practices, as a way in which artists seek to establish a specific relationship with the real, redefining visual language, aesthetics, and experimentation through depictions of social reality and personal, individual stories. Documentary practice thus becomes a broad and elastic category, a means of mediating our relationship with the real. Aspects of this understanding of documentary are at the center of interest not only for film practices but also for contemporary artistic production, serving as a way of interpreting reality and the world around us.⁹

In that sense, by framing the scenes that help her establish a critical dialogue, Jelena Jureša appropriates the forms of various material and conceptual dispositifs, institutions, media, and genres into a specific choreography of fragments—of film, photography, performance, concert, genre painting, museum, archive, and zoo, that is, of their formal, aesthetic, conceptual, and institutional premises—in order to question the strategies and methodologies, politics, poetics, and contexts that frame them. In this way, the works are structured as complex scores unfolding in several acts.

⁷ Cf. Branka Benčić, "Oštri rezovi", in Damir Očko, *Ljudska mjera*, (Zagreb: MSU, 2019).

⁸ Branka Benčić, "Cinemaniac X - curating moving images", in *Cinemaniac X – Contemporary Art and Cinema* (ed. Branka Benčić) (Pula: MMC Luka, 2011).

⁹ Mark Nash, *Experiments with Truth* (Philadelphia: Fabric Workshop and Museum, 2004).

How Is This Achieved?

Through the eye of the camera, *Aphasia* takes us to the closed halls of the Museum of Africa in Tervuren, Belgium, at the time when its display and canon were being redefined, while *Ubundu* uses an almost telescopic lens to frame a captive animal in the Antwerp Zoo. The two works serve as sites of witnessing and critical unravelling of the image of Belgian colonial history, inscribed in the history of social institutions and the accompanying technologies of power. These are spaces of cruelty and captivity, monitoring and control, people and animals. In this interrelation of nature and captivity, we recognize the framework of representation of Belgium's imperial colonial past, the politics of power embodied in the logic of the gaze, and museums as tools of propaganda. Through the bars of the zoo, the anthropocentric gaze represents a system of oppression that marginalizes and subjugates a rare, fragile, and unusual animal for the European continent—the okapi. The okapi, an animal whose existence became known to the West through Belgian colonialism in the Congo, is a paradigmatic example of how colonial conquests also entailed the appropriation of nonhuman life. Forms of objectification arise from the violence normalized by colonialism—violence that conditions relationships with animals as resources, trophies, or spectacle, rather than as living beings with intrinsic value. The zoo thus becomes an extension of colonial logic, in which domination over animals reflects and legitimizes broader patterns of power and control, recalling the structures of violence and technologies of power that shaped human–animal relations within the modernist paradigm of progress. Musealization and forms of displaying living and non-living “museum objects” can therefore be understood as a process of taming,

subjugation, framing, cataloging and organizing of the spoils. *Fine Art Museums are a natural resting place for dead bodies, like cemeteries.*¹⁰

¹⁰ Branko Vučićević, *Paper movies*, (Beograd: B92, 1998), 46.

Aphasia: Politics of Images and the Missing Image

Film and photographic images are the central interest of Jureša's critical reflection on otherness. Structured in three chapters, the cartography of *Aphasia* unveils certain formative codes of national identities, beginning with the colonial aphasia of Belgium's colonial past. It

continues by showing the Austrian racism and antisemitism from the period of World War II, and concludes with a photograph depicting the atrocities of the 1990s war in Bosnia—a photograph which we do not see at all.

Aphasia, a medical term meaning the inability to speak, can be understood as a complex visual essay on the inexpressible. From colonial aphasia to political aphasia, it concerns the possibilities and needs for representing historical traumas, as well as the experience of the viewer confronted with scenes of suffering in the past. The first part of the work is framed by colonial aphasia. This is followed by an Austrian episode involving the archive of racial experiments and Heimat films, from archives as sites for the renewed uncovering of forgotten and suppressed truths, indexing and cataloging people, and premeditated dehumanization, through the history of racism at the heart of the Monarchy, to the use of the mass medium of film as a tool for constructing a saccharine national identity after the Second World War.

The politics of an image is defined by its relationship to crime, says Pavle Levi.¹¹ In the context of *Aphasia's* three chapters, and bearing in mind the interest in Jureša's work, the relationship of film and crime is one of the key ethical and aesthetic questions the artist deals with. This relationship develops through images of various origins, from archival fever and fragments of feature films, to absence or lack—that is, the presence of an image that is missing. The empty space of the document is replaced by performance.

The starting point and interest in developing the narrative around which the third and final episode of *Aphasia* is constituted is the known, yet rhetorically and ethically unshown photograph, whose presence is almost tangible, so much so that it materializes before our eyes like a ghost throughout the entire work. However, we discern it in speech, recognize it in movement. It is present in the spoken words of the protagonist, in the tension of a leg swing, the torsion of the torso, and the tilt of the performer's body. It is the famous photograph of Ron Haviv made in Bijeljina, on April 2, which was described by Susan Sontag, Boris Dežulović, Jean Luc Godard: “We know the photograph by heart, so we can see it even with our eyes closed”.¹² In *Aphasia*, the photograph is present through complementary, mirrored performances by Barbara Matejčić and Ivana Jozić, i.e., in Matejčić's words and Jozić's movement.

¹¹ Pavle Levi, “Filmska slika i njen odnos prema zločinu”, in *Miniature* (Zagreb: Multimedijalni institut, 2021).

¹² In her text “I cannot remember the first time I saw that photograph”, published in the *Aphasia* exhibition catalogue in 2019, Jelena Jureša quotes the Croatian journalist Boris Dežulović and his article *Skriivena kamera u Bijeljini 1992.*

Digression on the Photograph

The photograph is described by Jean Luc Godard in his short video essay *Je vous salue Sarajevo* through repetitions, the movement of the camera's eye across the cropped surface of the image, and pauses on fragments and details, disassembling and reassembling it within an editing structure. The film collage functions as an accumulation of bodily fragments—a series of close-ups of soldiers and their victims: heads, boots, hands, weapons.¹³

13 Pavle Levi, *Kino drugim sredstvima* (Beograd: Muzej savremene umetnosti – Filmski centar Srbije, 2013), 196.

14 Sontag's broad point is that no image alone can reveal everything a viewer needs to know; "You Could get used to It: Susan Sontag, Ariella Azoulay and Photography's *Sensus Communis*", Joscelyn Jurich, *Afterimage*, April 2015, University of California Press (Oakland, CA)

15 It is our historic responsibility not only to produce photos, but to make them speak, *ibid.*

ment and translation. It is precisely in the movement of the performance that we recognize the unstable persistence of the scene, appearing like a ghost, fluid like memory. On a completely different, concrete, and functional level, the level of forensics, the photograph served as evidence.¹⁴ However, it can speak in different ways: it can speak in court, as evidence or testimony; it can convey knowledge, embed itself in collective memory, so that something is never forgotten. Advocating ethical viewing, as opposed to the spectacular, Ariella Azoulay highlights historical responsibility, not only in the production of images, but in enabling them to speak.¹⁵ The power of the image (photograph) lies in its ability to embed itself in memory and to speak about what is difficult or impossible to articulate, thereby helping to transmit memory. In Mostar—as in Srebrenica, Sarajevo, Vukovar, and other war-torn cities

The photograph is described in *Aphasia* using the words of Barbara Matejčić, investigative journalist and the protagonist of the work. Her presence is a kind of return to the present, a passage into reality, into "our" reality. Her spoken words connect past and present, confronting us with the scene of photographs from Bijeljina and their consequences. The question, "I wonder how much they know," unravels an entire network of relationships and responsibilities. The intent of confronting and revealing consequences is, after all, also the intent of *Aphasia*, and artists and artistic works help societies to remember more fully. In this appropriation of an image that is absent yet present the entire time, the mimesis of the performative component is structured as a substitute for the missing scene, a kind of reenact-

of the former Yugoslavia—*corps morcelé* becomes an iconic image of the 1990s. The disintegration of the country along ideologically imposed ethnic seams produced a multitude of personal, photographic, filmic, and television depictions of killings and massacred bodies.¹⁶ Contemporary life actually provides countless opportunities to witness the suffering of others from a distance, thanks to the medium of photographs, says Susan Sontag—and to remember increasingly often means to recall an image.¹⁷

16 Pavle Levi, *op. cit.*
17 Susan Sontag, *Prizori tuđeg stradanja (Regarding the Pain of Others)* (Zagreb: Algoritam, 2005), 70.

Reenactment and the Ethics of Viewing

Choreography of Violence. Reenactment. The central position in forming the visual narrative is a dialogue juxtaposing two scenes constructed on the basis of similarity—through shared elements of framing, color, light, space, atmosphere, and formal visual language—which interact as both the same and the other. Both frame a female figure, young women with lighter hair, dressed in a shade of olive-green shirt. The scenes share a similar atmosphere. Placed in a relatively neutral black-box space, occasionally giving a dramatic impression, the two scenes engage in a visual dialogue. In one, the woman is filmed from behind, performing movements that are simultaneously fluid and tense. In the other, she is shown *en face*, seated, delivering a monologue that, as if arising from a documentary interview or confession, speaks in the first person. Gradually, we recognize the parallelism of the scenes, which function as doubles. They are complementary, mutually enhancing and commenting on one another. Using different visual languages and formal means, they convey the same content. In the form of visual translation, we sense how the movement of the performance emphasizes or hints at the content of the spoken word.

Don't Take It Personally: The Counter-rhythm of Abundance

The artist's new experimental film, *Don't Take It Personally*, realized through a Croatian co-production with the support of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art and Kamov Residency, among others, is based on texts by Dubravka Ugrešić, relying specifically on two excerpts

from her book of essays *The Age of Skin*, and it explores the topics of historical denial, collective violence, exile, and resistance. Consisting of two parts—a preface and a central section—the work connects live performance with a form of film collage with fragmented scenes from Dutch Golden Age painting, representing the eternal splendor in the background of imperialist economy that is inscribed in the foundations of historical painting collections of fine art museums. In the blown-up details of painterly scenes, still life arrangements on tables of abundance alternate, while an editing cut—like a knife—slices through the soft tissue, fur, or feathers of dead animals, or the ripe fruit on a platter, alongside the textures of juices and blood rendered in oil on canvas. The second part presents a scene of performance: interior, stage, practical set, concert rehearsal, movement, music, vocal performance as lamentation, and tap dance as an expression of resistance. While the narrative unfolds as a cut-up textual collage, re-worked and taken from Dubravka Ugrešić's writings, linking the personal positions of personal biographies and journalism, it speaks about changes in human behavior, from the banality of evil to complicity and indifference, all shaped by capitalism and imperial greed, creating a loop between the experience of the outsider's position and the impressions after watching Joshua Oppenheimer's film *The Act of Killing*. Once again producing historical and temporal leaps between wars and nations, between genocide in Indonesia, the Netherlands, and the 1990s in Yugoslavia. Against the backdrop of earlier introductory images, the close links that existed well into the 20th century between art history and art museums, and the accumulated wealth and capital derived from various forms of slave labor, are unpacked. Whether historical or transhistorical, the time reflected in the film *Don't Take It Personally* as well as in the other films in the exhibition functions as a projection—a ghost—that, along the past–present–eternity continuum, generates a certain kind of unease.

Female Voice and Gesture

The exhibition display and its spatial configuration clearly show that the central positions in the two major films are held by the female protagonists. Yet, these women are not anonymous objects subject to the gaze; they are active female subjects and bearers of meaning, real people with names, life contexts, and work: *Barbara*, *Ivana*, *Marije*.

Their movement, gestures of protest, or voice constitute central points of an almost collaborative co-creation, an additional articulation of the work's performative aspect, enhancing its visual and semantic impact. In their performance, body, speech and voice—the monologue of Barbara Matejčić, the dance of Ivana Jozić in *Aphasia*, and the vocal rendition in the tradition of slam poetry and tap movements of Marije Nie in *Don't Take It Personally* (accentuated with music interventions by Alen and Nenad Sinkauz)—are sites of resistance, of telling the truth, and of opposing injustice, oppression, and patriarchal structures. They represent a continuity of women's struggle and possess emancipatory potential for a much broader, universal realm of political and social struggle—struggle that remains equally vital and relevant today in a global context, where many human rights and freedoms continue to be challenged, and injustice, fascism, discrimination, and the realities surrounding us persist.

Entangled Temporalities and Re-politicization

In relation to the history of trauma and abrupt temporal discontinuities, as well as turbulent social events, *Choreography of Violence* establishes a gaze that is simultaneously directed and hovering, panoramic—one that reveals the continuous history of violence inscribed in the functioning of the contemporary world, pointing to moments of rupture and breaks within given systems, as well as to sites of reflection. While the global picture of the world indicates a space beginning to fragment, through performative gestures or a politics of counter-images, sites of collapse are transformed into sites of potential transformation, emancipation, imagination, and hope. This fragmentariness is inscribed into a space of shared feeling, distribution of knowledge, social practice, and political power.

In this sense, the works presented in the exhibition can be viewed through the concept of *entangled temporalities* developed by Françoise Vergès, as well as through the idea of the political concept of time as incomplete and unfinished. Such a theoretical framework points to the idea that colonial pasts, racial capitalism, and the contemporary moment constitute simultaneous and mutually constitutive temporal regimes, where the modernist notion of linear progress—inseparable from structural forms of exploitation—is situated. Colonialism, therefore,

is not merely a historical episode but a persistent infrastructure of power. Entangled times are those in which the colonial, national, and contemporary are not separate layers, but mutually interwoven regimes of duration. Vergès emphasizes that entangled temporalities resist the

18 Françoise Vergès, “Entangled Temporalities, Cinema and Anti Colonial Feminist Education” in *Feminist Worldmaking and the Moving Image*, ed. Erika Balsom, Hila Peleg (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2022), 464.

fetishization of past, present, and future, focusing instead on nonlinear narratives, ruptures, openings, and dead ends.¹⁸ Here, the past is not understood as a completed and stabilized archive, but as an active and unpredictable force that continues to structure contemporary conditions of life, as well as regimes of visibility and representation, thereby confirming the thesis of the inextricable entanglement of time, memory,

19 Ibid., 467.

and power. Jelena Jureša’s film works can be read precisely within this conceptual field, as a space in which historical violence, institutional practices of memory, and contemporary politics of viewing continuously overlap and mutually condition one another. Colonial time, national mythology, the war of the 1990s, and the viewer’s present intertwine, and “entangled” time exists as a political fact: history is not finished, but returns through institutions, images, bodies, and gestures. The exhibition space functions in such a way as to establish temporal configurations in which genocide, colonial epistemology, and contemporary regimes of representation coexist, thereby destabilizing linear historical narratives and opening space for critical reflection on the responsibility of the viewer. Hence, the works of Jelena Jureša reveal that the war images of the 1990s are not a completed archive, but an active matrix of collective imagination; patriarchal structures are not merely a backdrop, but an organization of voice and body in the present; and choreography of violence is continually renewed—and can only be unraveled through critical viewing, speech, and performance. Vergès reminds us that *entangled temporalities as a field of practice impacts how we imagine the humanization of the world*.¹⁹

The re-politicization and unveiling of complex and traumatic events, as well as the colonial patterns of power manifested in internalized relations of patriarchy, racism, imperialism, and various forms of control rooted in the modernist image of the West, open up a space for critical and emancipatory reflection on the causes of injustice and their inherited effects in the present. The works of Jelena Jureša presented in *Choreography of Violence* exhibition confront us with the truths and silences of history, highlighting the power of art to give voice to what is

suppressed, forgotten, or unspeakable. They produce temporal cracks through which colonial histories, the war of the 1990s, feminist struggle, and contemporary forms of violence emerge simultaneously, while past violence is not represented as memory, but as a structure of the present.

Translation: Lidija Toman

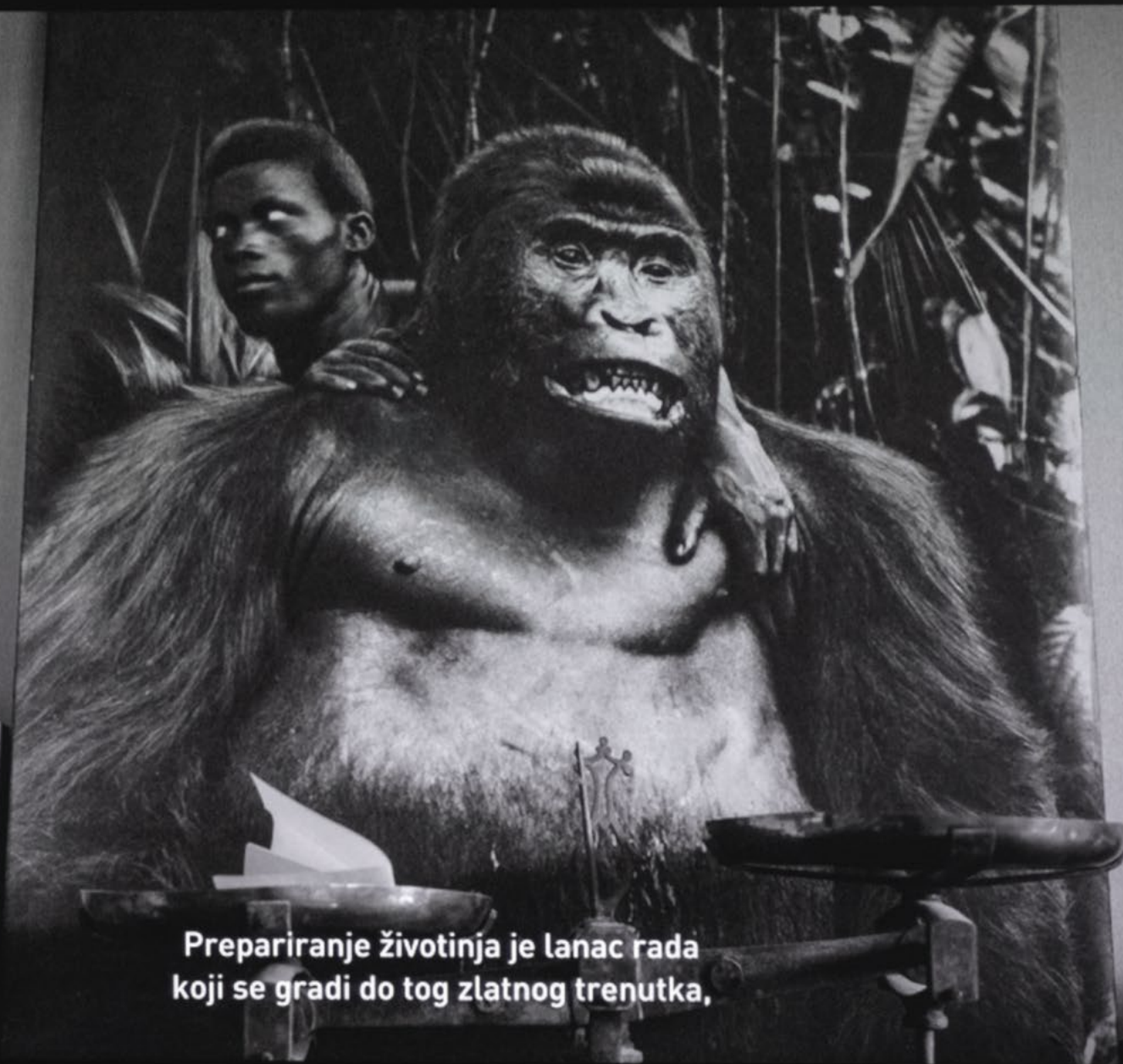
Jelena Jureša: Choreography of Violence
Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art
Installation views
Photos: Hrvoje Franjić, Tanja Kanazir
Courtesy of MMSU Rijeka











Prepariranje životinja je lanac rada
koji se gradi do tog zlatnog trenutka,







Ubundu

1938
1939
2017

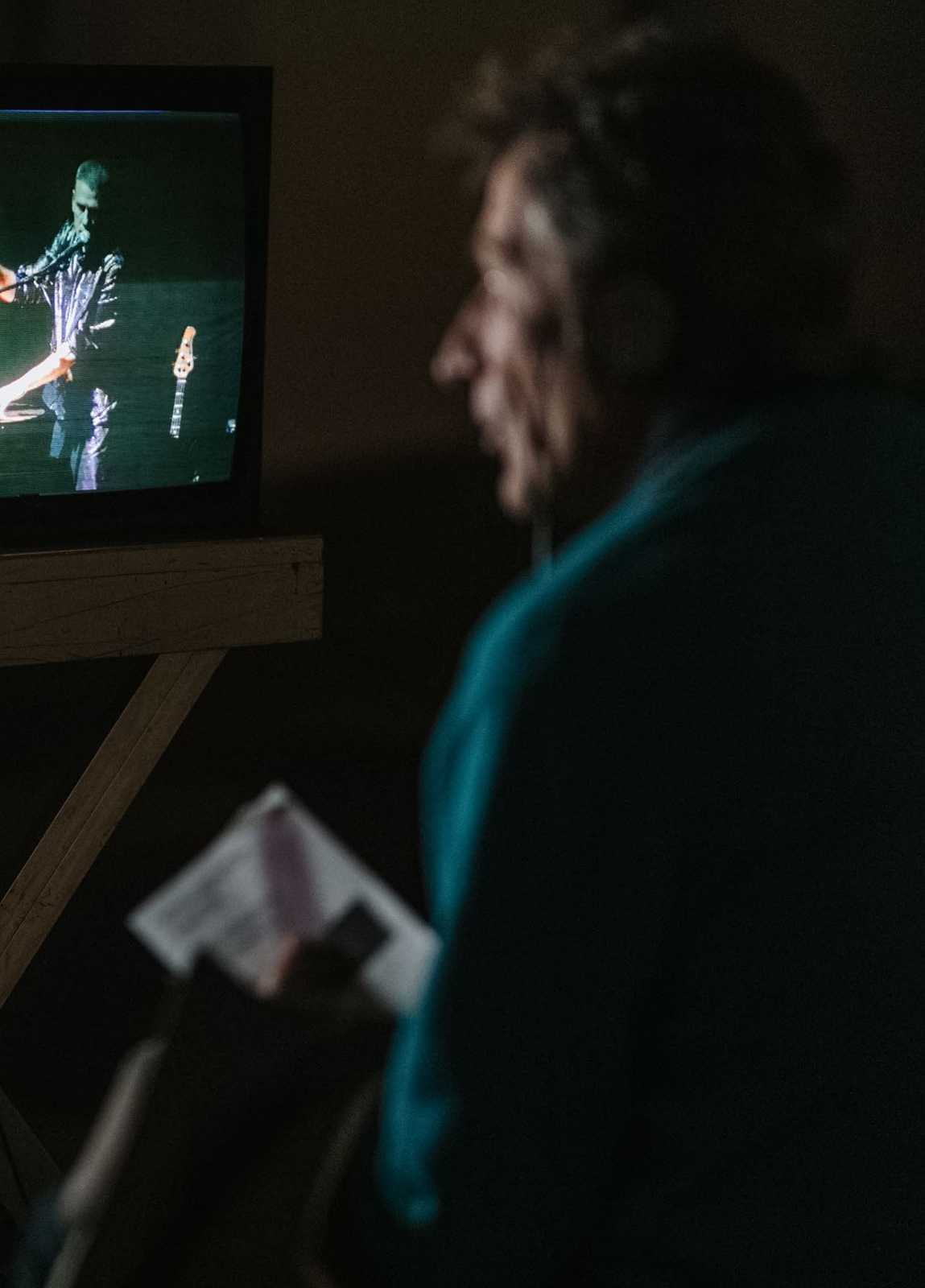
Ubundu, a black panther sculpture, is a representation of the panther's spirit. It is a sculpture of a panther's head, created by the artist in 1938. The panther is shown in profile, looking towards the left. The sculpture is made of black material, possibly wood or stone, and is mounted on a wooden base. The panther's face is the central focus, with its eyes and nose clearly defined. The background of the sculpture is a dark, textured surface, possibly representing a cage or a natural habitat. The overall composition is simple and powerful, capturing the essence of the panther's spirit.

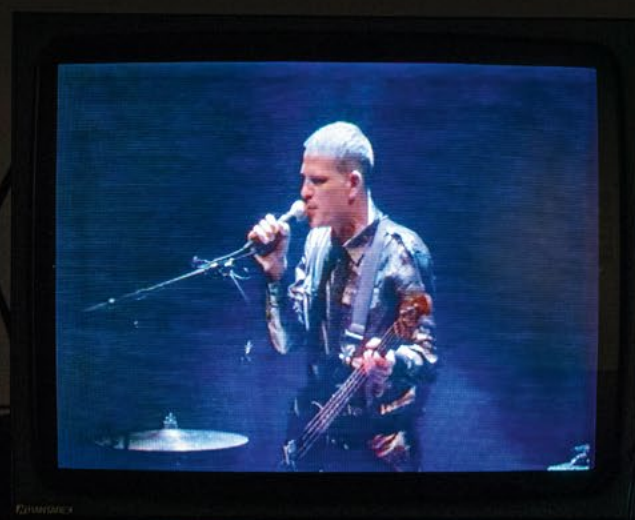
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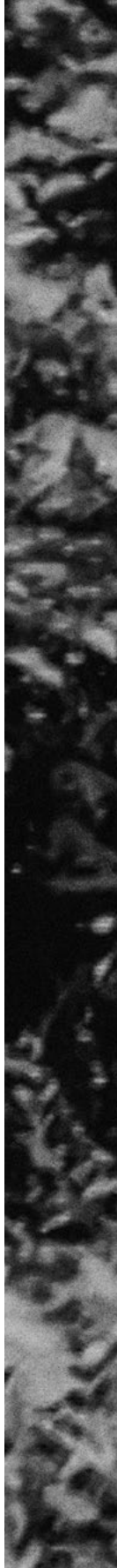


A photograph of a museum gallery. In the foreground, a dark wooden bench sits on a tiled floor. A large, light-colored rectangular platform is centered in the middle ground. On either side of the platform are glass display cases. In the background, a series of doorways lead deeper into the gallery. The scene is lit with soft, even light. The text "čvrstom rukom na vašem ramenu:" is overlaid on the platform.

čvrstom rukom na vašem ramenu:



Susret tako blag da
bi vas mogao ugušiti.



FRANCESCA RAIMONDI is an interim professor of philosophy at Freie Universität Berlin. She works at the intersection of political philosophy, social theory, and aesthetics, focusing on democratic temporality and aesthetic resistance. She is the author of *The Time of Democracy* and editor of *Seriality and Repetition: Revisited*.

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JELENA JUREŠA is a visual artist born in Novi Sad (former Yugoslavia), based in Belgium. Working with film, video installation, photography, and text, she examines cultural identity, gender, complicity, and the politics of memory, often linking individual stories to collective violence and historical denial.

Sanja Bojanić
*Seismograph of Shock,
Fracture and Attunement*

Maria Hlavajova
*Art that Conspires
– Three-or-So Footnotes on
Don't Take It Personally*

Francesca Raimondi
*Visceral Power and
the Work of Breath*

Shahram Khosravi
*To Repeat the World
is to Betray It*

Branka Benčić
*Entangled Temporalities**
*– Choreography of Violence
and Performative Gestures*



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