

hidden, invisible and dark events that occur in real-time in the urban space and re-process them as corporeal-map with a choreographic thinking.

The toolkit reveals those events that already exist in urban space, but that we are not fully aware of because they are at the periphery of our attention. More info about EM tools:

<https://emtoolsblog.wordpress.com/>

BLOCK 4.

The performance takes place simultaneously on stage and in the urban surroundings. In the first stage, the performer explores the urban space with the aid of EM Toolkit, capturing portions of space, shapes, geometries and objects. Following her, a second performer films, through a mobile phone, the capturing process of the first performer.

The state of alert and the perceptual selection dynamics, individually practiced/experienced by the performer, are broadcasted live and displayed in real time on a screen on stage.

Subsequently, the performer, after the capturing process, goes on stage and begins the extraction process of the postural sets she previously collected.

Reprocessed in the stage dimension, in another temporal and spacial scale, the postural sets (combined by similarities or differences) are relocated in the stage space through a process of re-memorization with which the performer remaps herself and her own perception of the space as lived in the urban experience. Meanwhile, a second capturing process begins.

The second performer who was previously filming, in turn begins the capturing process in the urban space.

A third performer films the capture and actions of the second performer.

The footage is again broadcasted in real time on stage where a screen is located near a square on the floor.

After the outdoor capture, the performers go back on stage.

A new process of extraction of the collected postural sets begins.

The performer enters the square situated at the centre of the stage and again reprocesses the postural sets she previously collected. The different capturing processes and the different corporeal sets recombined on stage, in a three-hour long temporal frame, are composed by subjective permutations that spread an unprecedented proxemics between bodies and objects, where the point of view of the observer is now also incorporated. The audience can freely decide to observe part of the performance and follow a performer through her actions and move outside to follow the steps of capturing the urban space.

Simultaneously, another part of the audience can observe the on stage performer's re-elaboration of the urban space captures.

The non-linear viewing of the show, in which the actions of the performers occur simultaneously in the urban space and on stage, enables the audience to overlap reality.

In this framework, the city is not a stage for dance, nor the body is setup to a site-specific mode. It is rather a situated work, in which the perception of the urban space is no longer information data but a practiced place.

Moving Projections

an interview with Niko Hafkenscheld & Valentina Stepanova on 'Gorodets'

How did your new project Gorodets begin?

That's partly a personal story. Valentina's lineage comes from central Russia and Armenia. The fascination with this region started with a curiosity about ancestors, how they lived and what you carry on from them. A search for your own roots. At the same time, you have the broader phenomenon of massive rural flight to megacities like Moscow and St. Petersburg. So we were interested to know, what the basis for this was, how life has changed, what we can find out about it, and how that forms part of our history as Western Europeans. In this sense, Russia is fascinating. It is the largest country in the world, always closely linked to Europe, and yet often strongly demonized, which shows us many blind spots. At the same time, there is a strong curiosity in it, even the climate alone, for example. I have long been dreaming to experience a deep winter at -40 °C, to understand how that physical condition affects you.

You went to stay in Gorodets to find that out?

We went to live for three periods (January, April, and September) in the Russian village of Gorodets, in the house of Valentina's grandfather. Each season was very different, so each time the experience was totally different. Gorodets is a small village from the 18th century, in a region that is now almost completely abandoned. There are still nine people living there. On weekends or during vacations, you will have a few extra visitors. There are over 20,000 of these abandoned villages in Russia, which have a very special atmosphere. They have something aesthetically pleasing, because even though they have been empty for decades, the decay is still incomplete. Sometimes it seems like someone could live there. Yet, it stands empty. The plants are too high, and the onset of decay is visible. In the winter, these villages are inaccessible without a tractor, because you cannot get through the snow. At this time, you are completely enclosed by frozen lakes, snowy fields and forests. The silence there is crazy. Yet, we have become intrigued by the picturesque scenery. At the same time, everything is primitive and unpredictable. You can plan nothing and spend the entire day just dealing with your basic needs. Sometimes we even had to change to a different home, because we had no heating. Those temperatures are simply lethal. You become extremely dependant on yourself, in the here and now.

Beauty in the midst of a hard, inescapable reality. How was this experience for you?

Something that we really wanted to understand was the idea of rural life as held by the generation who grew up there, but now live in cities. Valentina's grandfather was born in Gorodets in 1930, not so long after the revolution, during the time of Stalin. At the time, 80 percent of the Russian population lived in the countryside. Today, it is less than 20 percent. This is of course a global phenomenon, but in Russia this rural exodus was extreme. What you see today, is an idealization of rural life by a generation that grew up there. You get a friction between an increasingly modern city life and the desire to escape from it. Valentina's grandfather was almost constantly busy with trying to keep this idea of utopia alive, by reconstructing the home of his youth in Gorodets. On the other hand they used to cherish a utopia about the big city and life there, since they were attracted to it. We find this tremendously fascinating, the fantasy of places where we think we can find our happiness. And how different that often is in reality. In practice, it is often impossible to disconnect that beauty from that hardship.

How did you get started with the process?

We mainly started with recording, free documentary and video recordings of some romantic clichés that appealed to us. We are building an installation with some picturesque images that have some subtle movement, like a moving photograph, which are projected on tables made of sand. Through this, the audience can literally dig into the image, discover the image itself, its details, and also its history. So we want to explore this themes of projections literally and figuratively, and find a new way to deal with documentary material. How can so-called 'objective images' trigger a layered experience and perhaps even get a kind of live quality, allowing an active exchange with their audience? The installation is still in development, but the idea is that you visit a ghost town, where local stories and small talk are projected. Sound is also very important. The question is how we can integrate that banality and that beauty, that past and that present, that utopia and that reality. We are even thinking of using headsets with instructions to put people in contact with these things. It is a question of creating a space for a real experience.

How does your intervention in Venice relate to Gorodets?

In Venice, we delved deeper into this idea of the picturesque, and we explored media that are not usually associated with documentary: painting and drawing. We wanted to see how a documentary image could be translated through painting. We asked a number of local touristic landscape painters to paint images from Gorodets instead of summer Venetian cityscapes, while they sat in the city and looked out over the canals. This resulted in a small rupture in the expectations of tourists and passersby. Even in Venice, you have those two components: the tourist illusion and the contemporary life in an urban context. By brining those two images together, a sunny Venice and a snowy Russian forest, you got an interesting survey of both. I believe strongly in the stratification of reality, even the most banal things such as a touristy city view or conversation in the queue of a post office. I feel a lot of respect for that pure life, the honesty of that banality. We are always looking for something different, something that differs from the reality in which we live, but often you can find it where we already are.

In the very reality we are trying to escape, we can already find the utopia we are seeking.

Yes, there is a kind of tipping point between cliché and authenticity. In Gorodets, we have also included many banal conversations, in queues, in shops, in cafes, or on the street. Gossip, talk about the weather, everyday conversations. When people don't know you are observing them, they are more spontaneous. But when you are going into a formal interview, it immediately breaks the atmosphere. This method really questions the need for artistic intervention, because you do not want to intervene in that kind of purity. We just lift these moments out of context, and that produces a small shift. We all have a lot of clichés in our minds; the demonized image of Russia in Europe, for example. And we are closing each other in all the time, through these clichés or fixed images. In Gorodets, we try very gently to put these fixed images into motion again, allowing you to reconsider them.

