

Jump

into my

throat

by Jule Flierl



In this text I will leap into some of my recent experiences with you. I will start with describing a moment during performing, then I will talk about how listening became a voice practice in the Aerosol Lab, and tell how my voice showed itself to me as a technology that is not identical with my Self in a self-interview. I will send the imaginary of my conflicted voice-body-relation on an adventure in a piece of autofiction and I will introduce some loose references that accompany me in my path of figuring out what role voice has in the dancing body and in the dance field.

UFO



Photo: Anja Weber

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troubled relationships with listening to our own voices.

Summer 2021. I am standing on the stage area of the Festsaal in Sophiensaele facing the back wall, the light is off. Katalin Ladik's voice is played from a tape recorder. She speaks in Hungarian about her experience of participating in the UFO happening by Tamás Szentjóby and Miklós Erdély 1968 in Budapest and about her artistic response, the 1970 UFO party happening in Novi Sad. Irena² stands on the other side of the room and makes pulsing sounds with closed lips. I follow her impulses. When the tape stops we continue weaving the sound of our voices into the air of the theatre. We develop rhythmic patterns that meet and disentangle, melodic sketches that juxtapose and a pulsing of our voices tapping the space, which gives me the feeling that I'm singing underwater. A while later I am still on the dance floor but this time I face the audience. I swirl an object around my body from which I hear myself speaking, addressing my own voice. The autobiographical content of the text makes me feel vulnerable in the presence of the audience.

**This is a kind of
naked scene.
Irena and I are
disclosing so
much about our**

I remember that the content was generated during many deep conversations between us, which now gets exposed in front of strangers. I listen to Irena's recorded voice coming out of an object she hangs around her neck. There is something in Irena's text that speaks to me about myself and later I will hear that people thought about themselves while listening to our autobiographical notes. I go down on all four, grab the object that plays my voice with my teeth and put it in front of Irena, like a dog offering a bone to its favorite human. A moment later I take my object back and also pick up Irena's object, attaching her talking voice to my body and actions. We exchange stories, voices and places in the space before finally leaving the objects that play our voices hanging in space. Some time later I am still on this stage. I intend to sing without the gesture of singing. I produce tones between my magnetically attracted vocal folds, my mouth cavity touches words that come from a poem of Katalin Ladik- but in english. I enjoy shifting from balancing the original melody to destabilizing

it and gliding off to where my voice transports me to. I open the structure of this song whose melody Irena composed, while she is navigating sounds in her oral cavity, a noisy landscape of sculpted air somewhere behind me. We alternate and interrelate two vocal qualities that are dramatically different, our voices are two very different kinds of instruments.

We even define what our voices are in opposing ways.

Irena Z. Tomažin and I are very different kinds of instruments. It's the way we play ourselves that greatly differs from another.

Irena says "You (the voice) are me." While I state "Just to make it clear, you (the voice) are not me."

As we are almost at the end of the performance we start to shift our weight, standing close together at the back of the space. We swing from side to side and transition slowly through space. I am holding a baseline with a deeper pitch while Irena is singing a melody line. The weight shift becomes a dance, our arms and chest swirl around, our lungs and throats are shaken by the movement. We stay calm in the voice and listen to how the dance affects the air of our song. The song doesn't accompany the dance, the dance is lifting the song up to a sphere that can hardly be controlled and our singing becomes a kind of growling and calling. We are our own sound system and it's exactly that very personal, fragile and entangled sound system we want to talk about.³

¹ The hungarian-serbian performance artist Katalin Ladik called herself an UFO in the 1970s yugoslavia. She mainly wrote in her mother tongue hungarian, a minority language in her hometown Novi Sad. When she started to turn to SoundPoetry, this alienation became a tool and a request to her audience to listen differently to her texts. She also identified as a UFO because of the way she was treated in the literature scene. She felt that she was not taken seriously as a female poet within a machist poetry field. Then she started to stage her happenings and became infamous as the naked poet, exaggerating her flaw into a hyper-femininity.

² Irena Z. Tomažin, Slovenian choreographer/singer/philosopher

³ "U.F.O. - Hommage to Katalin Ladik" is a collaboration between Slovenian ChoreoVocalist Irena Z. Tomažin and German ToneDance choreographer Jule Flierl. It was premiered on the 15th of July 2021 at Sophiensaele/ Berlin and will be shown at City of Women Festival Ljubjana on October 10+11 2021



Photo: Anja Weber



Photo: Sieke Krönke

AEROSOL LAB

Last year I had this fantasy that I could contribute to saving live performance during the pandemic, if I just managed to develop a creative and protective breathing mask for voice performance. I planned to initiate an artist gathering that would create historic theatre masks, giving them the function of protective pandemic masks. I speculated that this artist initiative could enable a continuity of live performance and proactively intervene in the pandemic situation. When the second lockdown came in Germany I had to admit that the rules around gatherings didn't consider individual solution-oriented efforts, but were rigid bureaucratic architectures that didn't care for experiments with live performance. So I shifted direction, stuck to my fascination for masks, faces and breathing obstacles- and organised an online event called the Aerosol Lab.

The Aerosol Lab became an online extension of the series *From Breath to Matter*,⁴ which I initiated with dancer, teacher and composer Alessio Castellacci in 2017 and am co-curating with musician and theoretician Mika Hayashi Ebbesen since 2019. The pre-pandemic live events of *From Breath to Matter* were donation-based, artist-curated and non-institutional. I engaged in organising this series out of a desire to gather contemporary voice practices and present them in a non-theatrical setting: with minimal technical setup at the alternative art space Kunsthaus KuLe in Berlin.

Beginning of 2021, Mika and I invited the artists Siegmar Zacharias, Emilia Kuryłowicz and Karol Tymiński, Edyta Jarzab, Myriam Van Imschoot and Federico Protto, Anna Nowicka, and Zoë Knights into an online Laboratory situation, in which we exchanged about concerns and insights around breathing, discussed how reading faces is guiding how we listen to voices and what that means for social interaction in the masked public sphere of 2020/21. During a 2 days online event we showed online performances of the Aerosol Lab participants and held discussions afterwards.

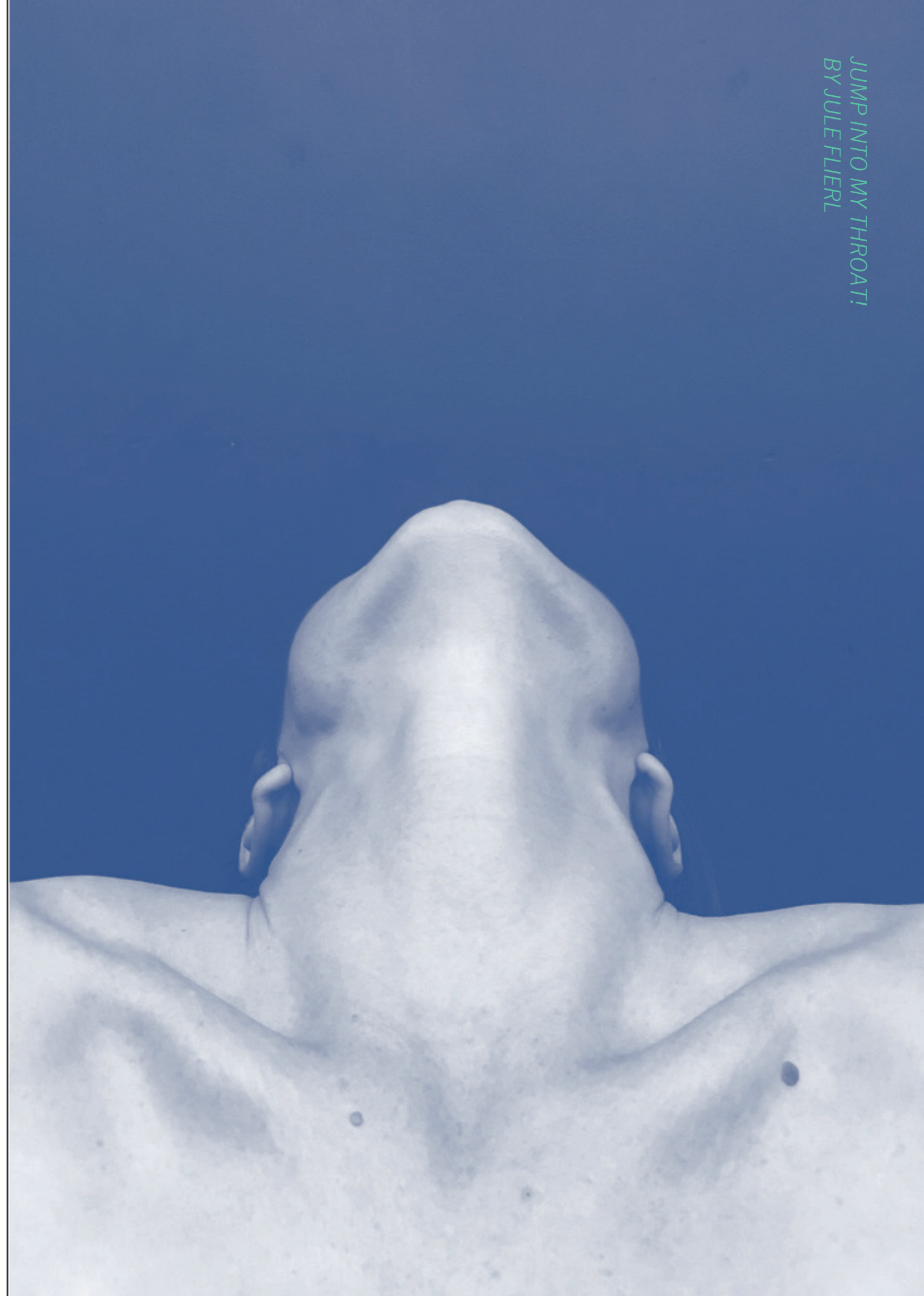
I like to listen to the thoughts and voices of artists from the dance field. My decision about where I'll guide my ear is as much part of practicing singing, speaking and experimenting with my own voice.

⁴ Archive of the events:
www.frombreathtomatter.com/salon

I ask myself how the voices that surround me become part of my voice, and, if they do, how much of my voice is owed to the voices I listen to?

As part of the Aerosol Lab, Mika and I interviewed each participant and published a Podcast⁵ that is dedicated to talking about choreographic practices with the voice. Asking questions to the above mentioned, very specific practitioners; listening to the raw audio files of the conversations many times and contextualizing each interview was a great moment of study.

5 www.frombreathmatter.com/podcast



SELF INTERVIEW



Photo: Dieter Hartwig

JUMP INTO MY THROAT!
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This spring I was asked to contribute a text to a publication⁶ and I decided to do a self-Interview. I recorded myself asking questions and then answering them out loud, alone in my room. Later that day I transcribed the interview. Here is the final question-answer exchange I had with myself:

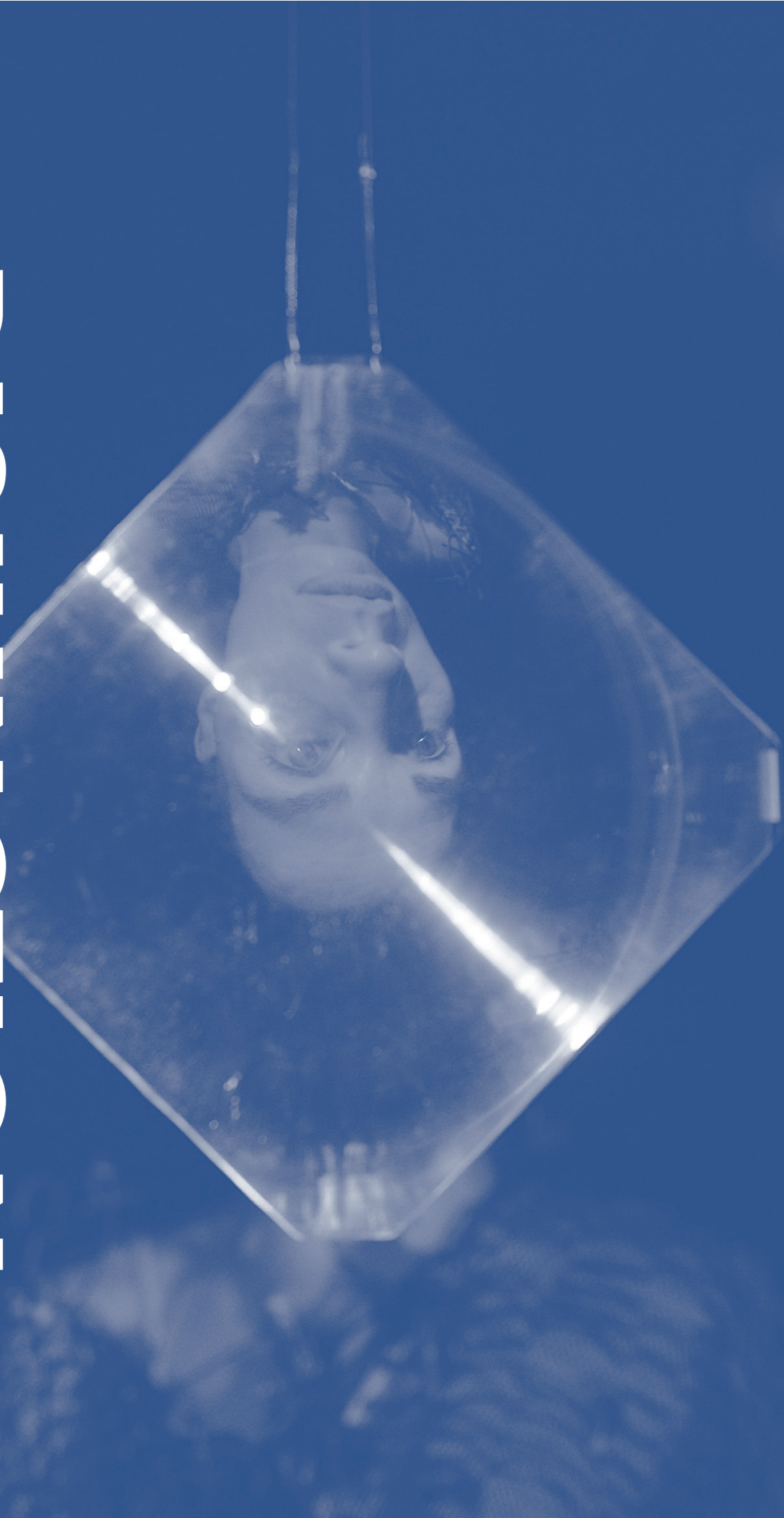
Q: I would now like to ask you a question that comes from Gisela Rohmert, the founder of the Lichtenberger Methode⁷. I will first say it in German and then in English. "Wer spricht durch meine Stimme zu mir?" translated: who is speaking with my voice through me, to me?

A: When I first heard this question I immediately wrote it down. It's so emblematic. This whole method is about asking questions that would stimulate an exploration of your own body as something opaque, that you don't fully know, developing a relationship to your self that is not about knowing and doing but about listening. My dance education has focused a lot on paying attention to how bones and muscles work in movement. Shifting my focus to the nervous system, it became an essential tool to decide how I talk to my body and what narratives offer. Who speaks through me, to me? By accepting that my voice has its own life, it becomes a huge challenge to work with this body concept in dance.

Instead of showing what I know and claim about my body, how can I choreograph a score that allows my body to show things about what I can be that surprises me and the audience?

⁶ Choreography: strategies, edited by Marta Keil and Joanna Leśnirowska, Art Stations Foundation, Poznań 2021
⁷ Method for functional singing, <https://www.lichtenberger-institut.de>

DISJUNCTION



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Once upon a time I was alone in a dressing room of some theatre, looking at my self in the mirror. It was then, when my voice started speaking to me and we got into a conflict about who was the more essential one in our collaboration. My voice said:

"Without me / there would be / no attention for thee. / Thou vessel 's empty / without me."

I disagreed and responded:

"If you were gone / work could be fun / without me / you would be done. No-one would ever look at you / or listen to the sounds you do. I can live without articulation / produce without justification / relate without intellectualization. Without my body, how would you survive? / If you were gone, I 'd feel more alive!"

My voice felt angry, righteous and hurt. I felt provoked and stubborn. I am not sure anymore how it exactly happened, but we decided to go separate ways.

I stayed with my body, flesh and tissues,

while my voice detached from me, going - or rather flying - their own path.

I went home, received a reminder about a Zoom meeting that was scheduled for that night and I wrote to the collaborator if we could just exchange chat messages. We spent the evening typing our conversation to each other. I asked myself how I would plan the performance for the next day in which I would be dancing and singing. Luckily I had quite a good recording of the last time I had performed the piece together with my voice and now prepared an audio recording of it. I wanted to tell the sound technician how to play the audio in the right moments. Then I remembered that I no longer could talk. I decided to write a mail, in which I announced that we would do two run-throughs and that I would announce with hand signs when the tracks needed to be played. The first run went very awkward, then in the second one I got better in catching the timing of the audio with my lip movement to make it believable that this was in fact the sound of my living voice.

The show went well, but in one moment I lost balance, which screwed up my timing, while the audio track just went on. I later got a message from a friend who was sure that because of my obsession with ventriloquism I made this trick on purpose. The show was over, I bowed for applause and made the lip movement for thank you, and even if I still had a voice, no-one would have been able to hear it during the loud applause. Directly after the show I was nervous. I wanted to mingle in the foyer, talk to people and have a chat at the bar. I was quite distressed, I didn't know what to do. Should I go home like a real diva and not show my face at all? Instead I came out and made gestural signs and lip movements to signify that I had lost my voice. Losing their voices happens to performers sometimes. The cure is not to speak for one month. I made up this story, survived the after show gathering and prepared myself to somehow get my voice back. Not through resting though. I had to find them, and wondered: where might my voice be now?

After their divorce from my body, my voice was able to travel very fast and far. My voice, or should I say "this voice", felt free and was singing and humming along the way. This voice could finally fly without the leash of my body being attached to it and holding it back from its joyful capacity to fly through the landscape. Yoko Ono's ⁸ fluxus score says: "fly!" It means: get rid of the body! Maybe Ono also experienced this kind of joyful

divorce? This voice was getting high and higher when a strong wind blew towards it. They were wobbling. There was still some kind of balance to keep when flying and now this voice had nothing to resist the storm with since they didn't have a body anymore. The voice was screaming against the wind but the wind wouldn't stop, this voice got pushed down and flew up without any own agency, the voice became like a football that was being played by the storm. Then it started to rain and the voice dropped down onto the floor, drawn downwards by the heavy raindrops. How could this voice still be so depending on outside situations? This voice managed to flee the rain, flying under the front stairs of a house. This voice was sobbing, they felt alone and exposed. A person exited the door and heard the sobbing that came from under the stairs. The person went down the stairs, around the corner and looked into the space under the stairs. There was clearly a sobbing sound, but there was no source to see. There was no one. The person turned around to leave, but this voice decided to speak.

"Please / Please. Hear my plea / Please- help me. Thy don't see my lack / need my body back."

The person got scared and could not make any sense of this situation. All of this seemed rather like a schizophrenic episode than something to interact with. This voice stumbled and ceased to sob. This voice realized that it couldn't make itself heard

without having a body attached to it. This voice decided to wait until the rain was over and to somehow make their way home. This voice was afraid my body was as happy and satisfied without the voice as I had announced.

It took one week for this voice to fly back under such bad weather conditions and for me to exit the house again to meet the voice that was waiting there. I had been avoiding people, I had been cancelling dates and withdrawn myself from social situations, as I had not been prepared for such a dramatic shift in how I could interact with people. I had researched for groups of people with mutism and planned to join

This voice wanted to be my voice again.

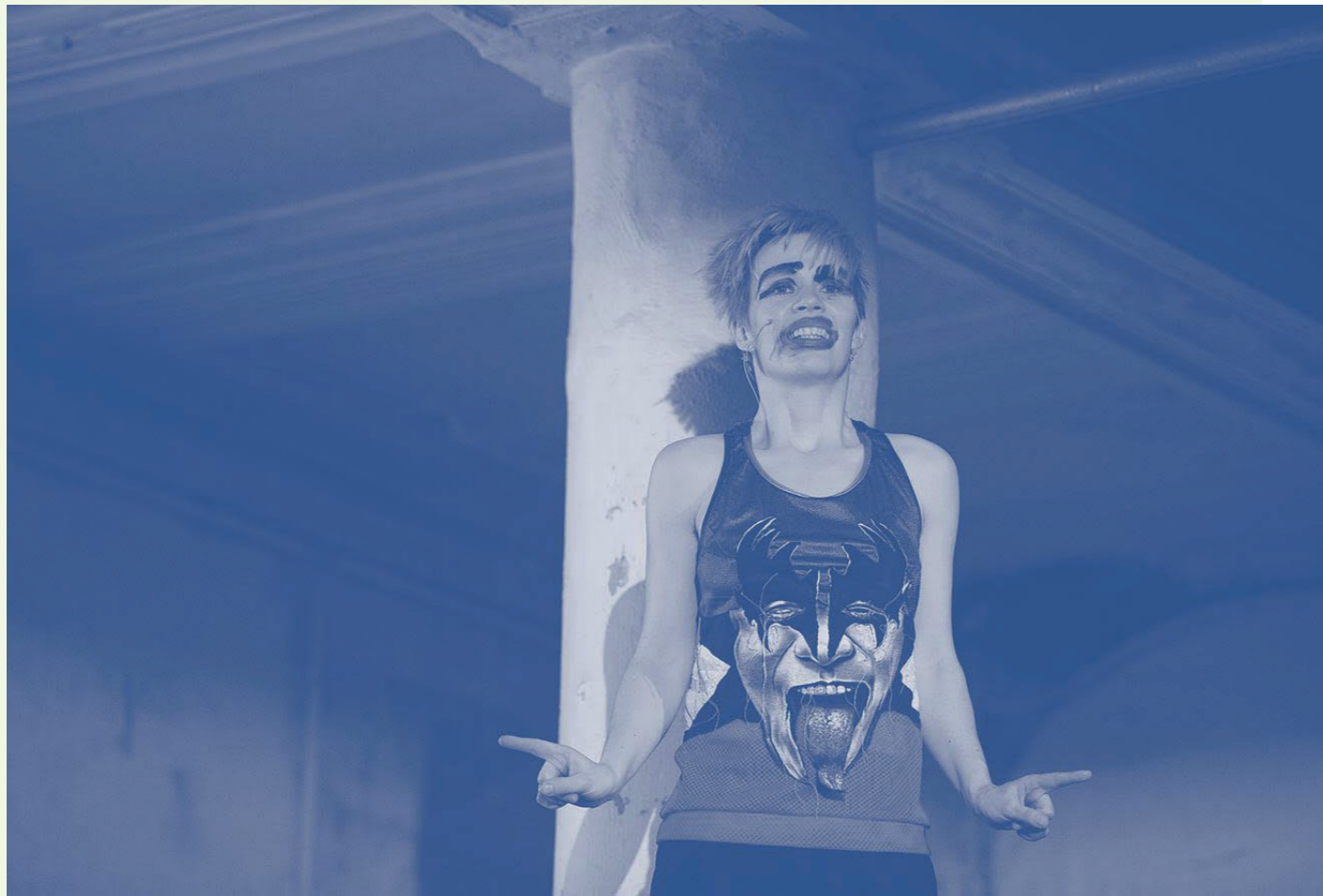
one of them. I was at a point where I was ready to let go of how I used to communicate in the past, to really explore how to live without my voice. And this is when I exited my door, on the way to a preliminary talk to one of these groups, that I met this voice again. This voice was very emotional

and talked about their experiences with the weather and with how it felt to be invisible. I couldn't respond, but I reached out my hands wanting to touch and hold this voice but I couldn't see it. I reached towards the area in the air where I heard it coming from. The voice giggled and told me to open my mouth. I opened my mouth and this voice jumped into my throat. I felt something becoming alive under my tongue, it tickled a bit and I had to cough. I heard myself coughing. I heard myself clearing my throat and say:

"Oh!"

Then I heard myself giggling. Then I wanted to sing. I tried out different pitches, shifted into melodies and how they felt in my chest, throat and skull, I took a walk cheerfully talking to trees, birds and to my voice.

Since we are back together, our disputes have not stopped but they are... let's say on the next level. What has changed is that we are in a bigger acceptance of our interdependence. What is really good for both of us is that we found a way to consciously separate from each other at times. We are practicing on making a method out of this, a spectacular number of a voice freeing itself from the body, all of this on stage, exposed to the gaze and ear of the audience ⁹. Once we will succeed in this trick, we need to find a way of inviting other peoples voices into my throat. I woke up with this idea this morning.



Photos: Dieter Hartwig

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I dream of many different voices inhabiting my throat at the same time. Maybe my voice doesn't want to live alone there anymore? What about a shared living situation in my larynx? There is a lot of space there! I need to ask my voice about their opinion on that plan. I really hope they will agree with that idea that excites me the most I must say!

jumps into everybody's throat who thinks about her glorious times as a grotesque dancer? I think that's precisely what I have experienced. I premiered "Störlaut" in 2018 and honored Valeska Gert as a foundational figure of voice experimentation in dance. I researched traces of her "Ton Tänze", ToneDances, and speculatively reinterpreted them.

We only need to recruit voices who are sick of the bodies they are stuck in. I'll invite them into my body, I'll be a splendid host.

I wonder if my voice would die with me once my body stops being alive. Now that I have experienced that my voice has a life outside of my body, even if it has a quite hard time out there without me, I wonder how many bodiless voices are wandering around. Is that what happens in spiritistic sessions when the voice of a ghost enters the throat of a medium who speaks in tongues? Could it be true that these voices manifest themselves in interferences of technical devices such as radios, telephones and video calls? I have never been quite sure if I only imagined it, or if I was really channeling Valeska Gert¹⁰ during my rehearsals. What if her voice still floats around in the air and

Her voice that shines through in her writings and manifestos deeply touches and influences me. "Störlaut" is not a Solo Performance, it is a trio between me, my voice and Valeska Gert's ghostly voice. She still has so much to say and I gave her a lot of space. At the beginning of each rehearsal I opened my mouth to let her jump in. During the rehearsal I was listening to her while her voice stemmed out of my body. To listen and study, while letting that voice do what it pleases was an uncanny experience of a self-concert, my body was the stage for the concert that Gert gave me, through my own body. Where did her urge to be heard, to be loud and to disturb come from?

PHONE DANCE



Photo: Irena Z. Tomažin, Jule Flierl

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Why to care about the shift from silent dancing to sound dancing? Bojana Kunst wrote an article called "The voice of the dancing body" a while ago. She describes the ideal of voicelessness in western stage dance:

"As we know, one of the most important conventions of the ballet body is its dancing voicelessly, gliding along and challenging the limitations of gravity without any sound. The breathing of the body must be silent, its physical efforts inaudible. The body dances as if it did not produce any sounds at all, gliding along the dance floor, flying in the air and touching its dance partner in silence. This kind of absence of voice, the paradoxical silence of the active body, is not only a consequence of the strict disciplining of the body, but it also forms part of the complex technique of subjectivisation and establishment of the early modern body. In ballet, the dancing body suppresses its chaotic and unforeseeable voice in order to be able to become speech."¹¹

The relationship of a dancer to their own voice is an essential part of the dance they are dancing. If they dance in silence it's a certain rhetoric. If they decide to work with the rhythm of their breathing it's a decision that shapes how the witness follows the dance. And if they want to sing the music to their dance themselves, make pre-verbal sounds or declare the voice a dancer, the relation between the voice and the dancer becomes a choreographic manifestation of what this body can represent and communicate.

The dancer is a musical instrument, the dancer performs a form of physical speech, the dancer articulates a kind of speech that possibly includes voice but doesn't have to.

Gert was a unique figure in the Weimar Republic dance field and genres like grotesque dance or dadaist dance are not matching her work, that cannot be put in a canon easily. Instead she created a canon herself: TonTanz (ToneDance). I have read some reviews that describe what a shock Valeska Gert's ToneDances were for her audience. She claimed to be the first dancer who ever used her voice. It's not important to me if that is true or a lie, what counts is the radical experience for the audience who witnessed a woman who didn't hold back. She didn't create the TonTanz as a conceptual idea. She just simply didn't want to hold back her screams anymore. She wrote in her 1932 article "Über den Tanz" for the paper "Kulturwille", Issue- Working class and Theatre:

"In some of my dances my feelings were heightened to such extremes that it took effort to hold back screams of pleasure or pain. One day I went but one step further, I no longer controlled the screams, and arrived at sound. An example is Kummerlied, a rhythmic, elementary burst of sound. I gently began to sob. The sobbing constantly becomes stronger until it culminates in sorrowful bawling, dropping off and ending in a short, jerking single sob. One day I was no longer satisfied with sound and I arrived at the word. I created the word exactly as I did earlier with movement. Being tense, I stammered to myself certain, non-verbal words. I hung on

the ones that released me and I put them together. My Disease began like this..."¹²

Valeska Gert started making dances just in the beginning of the Weimar Republic, when women could vote and "give their voices" for the first time in this fresh democracy. Also, public speech of women in politics, cabaret and literature gained a new momentum. But the century old perception of female speech as irrational and "hysterical" was still persisting then, as it still shapes the listening to female speech today. I read this 1995 text "The Gender of Sound" by Anne Carson in which she describes how already in classical Greece, it was seen as virtuous for a woman to stay mute:

"Closing women's mouths was the object of a complex array of legislation and convention in preclassical and classical Greece, of which the best documented examples are Solon's sumptuary laws and the core concept is Sophocles' blanket statement: 'Silence is the cosmos (good order) of women[...]' The official rhetoric of the lawgiver is instructive. It tends to denounce bad sound as political disease and speaks of the need to purify civic spaces of such pollution. Sound itself is regarded as the means of purification as well as of pollution[...] Female sound was judged to arise in craziness and to generate craziness."

At the time when Gert developed her infamous and brave artistic language, her audience was also getting used to a new medium: Sound Film. While in silent movies the missing voice of a character was a gap that could be filled with everyone's fantasy, the new medium of sound film confronted the audience with the harsh reality of the actual voices of former silent movie celebrities. It was a big shock for the public to finally hear Greta Garbo's deep voice and her Swedish accent. Many silent movie stars didn't survive the arrival of sound film.¹³ Gert wrote a lot about how she was influenced by a new way of perceiving and capturing the world through film editing techniques in film, and

it is no coincidence that while silent film transitioned to sound film, she transitioned silent dancing to sound dancing.

In notes from his inheritance, Sergej Eisenstein wrote about Valeska Gert:

"She is unique in her coordination of articulation: one can see that sound-intonation is movement, which is usually forgotten when it comes to our Coloraturas. One can see that Intonation is the acrobatics of the sound-articulating limbs."¹⁴

Unfortunately the term ToneDance that Gert invented got lost in the sudden rupture of her artistic peek, when her dances were declared "degenerate" and she was forced out of Nazi-Germany as a Jewish refugee. Picking it up again, I propose this term as a container for diverse developments in the dance field since then. ToneDance doesn't include any type of voice use in the dance field. Gert complained about being misunderstood by contemporaries, who only recited and danced, which is not what she defended. Following Gert's definition, ToneDance means to dance with one's voice. I found a text called "Meine Auffassung vom Tanz" (My conception of dance) at the Berliner archive AdK. The article is only present as a paper cutout, without any indication where it was published. Here she wrote in 1936:

"Why depicting a person only through movement? - Can one not dance with sounds as well? - When one feels like dancing, one gets into a drunkenness, which can make out of originally naturalistic sounds, dancing sounds."¹⁵

¹¹ <https://kunstbody.wordpress.com/2009/03/20/the-voice-of-the-dancing-body/>
¹² Translation: Jule Flierl

¹³ see Michel Chion, The voice in Cinema, 1999
¹⁴ quote taken from Valeska Gert: Ästhetik der Präsenzen, Wolfgang Müller, 2010
¹⁵ Translation: Jule Flierl

PHONIC ACTION



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Another artist-coined-term is the “phonic action” by before mentioned performance artist Katalin Ladik, who worked from the 1960’s on in Yugoslavia and Hungary. In an interview with Saša Asentić and Ana Vujanović called “Tigers leap into the past” from 2011, she tells:

“The fact that I was a language minority brought this poetic inferiority complex, because I was trying to disperse these boundaries that language was imposing upon me, to destroy them, and not just destroy, but turn them into an advantage, I wanted to turn the trauma of being a minority into an advantage.”

Originally being a poet, she transitioned from reciting to giving more space to the performativity of her voice and thus putting the act of articulation into the center of attention.

Ladik elevated her words into a textural sphere beyond speech, an oral landscape located somewhere close to experimental music, embedded in the situation it creates.

Emese Kürti wrote in her 2017 book "Screaming Hole" about the phonic action:

"The phonic action, which Katalin Ladik retroactively classified as a performance, consisted of performative interpretations of textual and auditive components, driven by a dissatisfaction with the restrictive dimensions of the written text. The action, which was constructed as a critique of two-dimensional poetry, deconstructed the distinction between words and acts as defined by Austin and substituted acts for the meaning of words restricted to classic statements. The type of sentence J. L. Austin's speech act theory calls a performative sentence implies that a speech act involves carrying out an act, in the course of which the relationship between action and text becomes balanced. [...]

In this sense, Katalin Ladik's phonic actions realized the subversive intermediality of poetry, music, and visuality in a feminine rendering of speech act theory. The action was based on the principle of intensification and moved from the speech act of poems that were originally written texts and could be semantically decoded to the abstraction of pure sound poetry that denied meaning, thereby uniting the performativity of the text with the language of body art and the media of archaic and contemporary music."

During the process of creating our Hommage to Katalin Ladik, called U.F.O., Irena Z. Tomažin and I have written speculative definitions of the phonic action, that later on served us as scores:

Irena

A phonic action is a two directional transformation of an object and subject of experience. The phonic action is a vehicle of transformation.

Jule

The phonic action is a vocal gesture that changes the texture, meaning and reading of the performative space. It can be long or short. Its aim is to radically change the experience of a situation. The phonic action is a task-based performative tool that can either be defined by its intention or by its actual physical and somatic consequences.

Screaming could be a phonic action for example.



Photo: Anja Weber

THE SCREAM

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One day me and my voice found ourselves in a temporary art space. The talk with Laurie Anderson ¹⁶ was about to start, we listened with excitement. For the beginning, Anderson told the story of Yoko Ono, who was asked about her opinion on Trump winning the election. Ono screamed for one minute into the microphone.

It was not just my voice screaming, my whole body screamed too. This was a very harmonious moment in our collaboration, but I must admit that my voice left scars on my vocal chords and imprinted the scream on my fleshly body. During the act of screaming, my voice and I were diving in the surrounding screams

“Aaahhhhhhhhh!”

Then, Anderson asked the audience to think of reasons in their life and in the world to scream about, to let go of, to disturb and to shake up with a collective scream. She asked everyone to scream as a kind of prologue before each voice would go silent, helping their bodies perform an attentive audience again, letting only one voice speak, Anderson, the reason all of us came here. Now the audience screamed for one minute together. Me and my voice screamed together.

and all together the screaming choir gave another experience of what the audience was and could be in this moment. Everybody else was here with their own voice too, and each voice enjoyed showing themselves, taking lots of space in this one minute. The group scream was loud, it wasn't shy, it was explicit, it was choral and it contained many different emotions. We screamed on cue, a humble scream after having gotten permission from Laurie to scream, but still it was transformational because

“Aaahhhhhahhhhhhaahhhah!”

each person-voice- duo had found many reasons to scream about. The surrounding screams amplified each other, voices jumped in and out of throats, exchanged bodies, affirmed each other and built alliances over the agreement of bodies and voices, that it was necessary to scream right now. Very Loud.

“Aaahhhayaahhhhhhh!”

Photo: Jule Flierl

¹⁶ U.S.American dancer, composer, performance artist

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A SOUND HAS NO LEGS TO STAND ON

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