

Portfolio

Some Notes on Ivana Müller's *Notes*-project (2018)

Christel Stalpaert

Note-taking encompasses witnessing, drawing, writing,
and diagrammatic thinking; it is speculative,
manifests a preliminary moment,
a passage, and acts as a memory aid.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Preface to *The Book of Books*.
DOCUMENTA (13), 2012: 14.

On 15 December 2017, I received an e-mail by Silvia Bottiroli, at the time curator of the upcoming artistic project of the May Events (May 2018) at Arts Centre Vooruit in Ghent and the KunstenFestivalDesArts in Brussels. She invited me to participate in Ivana Müller's *Notes*-project. We had already been in contact in the context of my research on new modes of activism and contemporary performing arts. She writes to me:

Dear Christel,

I am writing to invite you to participate in one of the artistic projects of The May Events, the program I am curating at the KunstenFestivalDesArts in Brussels and at Vooruit in Gent in May 2018.

One of the projects we are producing is a new version of Ivana Muller's "Notes": here enclosed you can find a letter from Ivana, where the aim and the structure of the work is explained further.

As you will see, the project is starting with a meeting with all the participants (that we would schedule in Brussels on January 11th), where each future reader is invited to propose some possible titles for a book to be chosen

and read collectively. The book would then circulate from one reader/annotator to another, and in the end of this process two public conversations would be held in Brussels and in Gent in May.

But before giving you more details about the articulation of the work and the involvement of the annotators, I would like to check if you are interested in being part of it, and available to dedicate some of your time to this collective practice in the next months.

Looking forward to your reply, I hope you will accept our invitation and stay at your disposal for any further information about this work and the curatorial framework of The May Events.

All the very best,
Silvia

The e-mail was accompanied by a letter, written by Ivana Müller, explaining the aim and structure of her *Notes*-project.

Paris, 15/12/2017. Dear future annotator.

Here some information about the project *Notes- May 2018* which we would kindly like to invite you to. The first version of the project happened in Autumn 2016/ Spring 2017 and it was commissioned for the exhibition *Heritage Depot*, organized by Theater Freiburg and Museum für Neue Kunst Freiburg in Germany. The annotators in this version of *Notes* were Paula Ant Hampton, Bojana Kunst, Paz Rojo, Jonas Rutgeerts, David Krebs and myself. The book we chose was *Echolalias - On the Forgetting of Language* by Daniel Heller - Roazen.

For more information please check:

<http://www.ivanamuller.com/works/notes/>

Caspao,
Weber

The idea of the project is to create a practice for a collective reading and writing that allows a frame for sharing of a certain common, for anticipating and imagining the "other", and for developing new possible individual and collective narratives and associations with a book as a starting point.

The concept of *Notes* is inspired by the 19th century practice of 'marginalia', which cultivated a gesture of "personalizing" a book before offering it to a friend or a lover by writing notes in the margin.

In *Notes* this gesture of love or friendship becomes a poetic/artistic/critical gesture in which a community of 6 readers-annotators write notes in the margin of the same copy of a book that they chose together, one after the other and in a set order, sharing this body of literature/knowledge as a matrix and a space for all sorts of reflections and associations, that go beyond the book itself. Their writing(s) in the margins create a hybrid-manuscript that gets grafted onto the text of the existing book, proposing a new "choreography of thoughts" with the original body of work.

The shared book is chosen collectively by the 6 readers from a pool of suggestions proposed by each individual annotator. It is a piece of writing (that could be any genre of fiction/theory/essay/poetry) that all 6 of them desire to read, annotate and share.

Once the book is chosen, the festival/venue that organizes the project, in this case Vooruit and KFDA, buys a copy of the book and the annotators start reading and annotating in a decided order.

After the process of annotation the book will continue its life as a book, staying outside of official institutions and continuing its travelling within the reading communities of Gent and Brussels (or further).

The 6 annotators choose the first reader together. That person reads the book and gives it to another reader which then gives it to another reader etc. The book's journey will last for 10 years, taking unpredictable paths, driven by chance, trust and hopefully by gestures of care. A log of all readers during this 10 year journey will be kept as part of an archive, slowly tracing the cartographies of the emerging reading community.

Before the process of annotation begins there will be a meeting in the second week of January in Brussels, where we will talk about methods, time frames, formal aspects, larger contextual frame of the project etc. This will also be the moment in which the 6 annotators will choose the book together.

Once you decide to participate, more detailed information about the protocols of annotating will follow.

I really hope you will join the project as one of the annotators and looking forward meeting you in January in Brussels.

With best regards,
Ivana Müller

I agree to participate in the project and become a future annotator. Following the annotating procedures of the *Notes*-project, I will be writing "notes in the margin of the same copy of a book" that we will "choose together, one after the other and in a set order, sharing this body of literature/knowledge as a matrix and a space for all sorts of reflections and associations, that go beyond the book itself".

As an annotator, I also become a member of the reading community, inaugurated on 11th January 2018. Sharing time in the offices of the *KunstenFestivalDesArts* in Brussels with Ivana Müller, the fellow annotators and lots of books, we go through the annotating procedures.



© Ivana Müller

NOTES ON NOTES

- Each person has a maximum of 2 weeks to read and annotate the book and hand it to the next annotator.
- You have to communicate with the next annotator to set up the meeting to hand him/her the book.
- the book should be handed to the next annotator directly. No post delivery or courier service. If you cannot give the book personally make sure that you find a person and a place where the handing of the book can take place.
- You should communicate if you have a major delay, as it will affect the rest of the annotators.

Annotating procedures:

- One should use the space of the margin according to one's territorial, political, graphical and human beliefs.

- Each "voice" has a colour. Please choose a colour that nobody else has chosen. You can go for different shades of the same colour but they have to be clearly distinguished.

- You can use different tools (pencils, pens, ink, paint) to annotate as long as it is in the same colour.

- You can use collages, glue objects into the book, highlight bits of text, underline it etc. but the manuscript has to stay readable, i.e. your annotations and marks should (definitely) not hinder the text or the reading.

So, no erasing, no crossing-out, no cutting-out.

- It is possible that one person has several voices. If so, these also need to be done each in different colours.

- You should take care of the visibility and sustainability of the notes, i.e. try to make them "readable".

- With your notes you can refer
to the text itself,
to the other, already existing, notes,
to the other annotators or
to the "future reader".

- In general, it is better if your notes provoke questions rather than give answers.

Thank you and enjoy!

Notes of the First Meeting, 11 January 2018. On choosing the book.

There are five of us, coming from a very diverse background.

Róise Goan is an Irish writer, director and producer who studied Drama and Theatre Studies at Trinity College. She is currently engaged at the Arts Centre Vooruit as a guest dramaturg and freelance arts programmer. She is the artistic director of The Local Group, a new company that creates performance projects with local communities of place and interest in off-the-grid locations. In January 2019, I also attended a first meeting in a series of a 'no experience required' knitting and craft group. It gathers to listen to stories exploring the history of women's craft in the hyperlocal context of West Donegal in the north west of Ireland, and also to discuss social and cultural questions about 'labour' through our ongoing, informal craft practice.

Michiel Vandevelde is a Belgian dancer, choreographer, curator and writer who graduated from P.A.R.T.S. in 2012. As an artist in residence at Kaaitheater he created *Paradise Now (1968-2018)* (2018) with fABULEUS, which premiered at the KunstenFestivalDesArts. The performance investigates "the vestiges of the legacy of May '68 with a new generation of young people". As the flyer announces, it restages the legendary *Paradise Now* by the New York theatre company The Living Theatre dated July 1968. The performance rethinks concepts of togetherness, the collective and the individual, revolt and revolution, ...with young performers who are so-called digital natives. What do these concepts mean for individuals who grew up in a digital, media-saturated age? This performance surely resonates with the May Events in which the *Notes*-project is embedded.

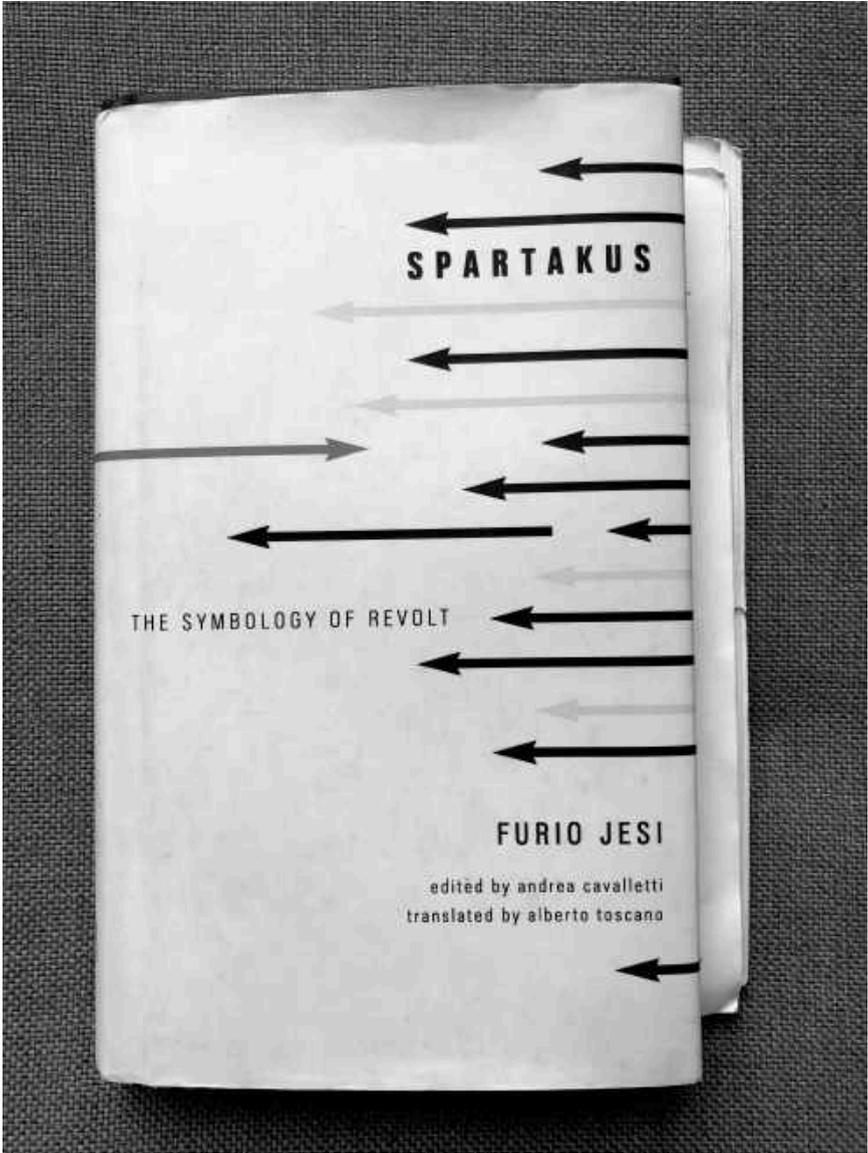
While I was familiar with Róise's and Michiel's work, the reading community also presented new faces to me. Maxime Arnould is a student at INSAS, and Laurence Rassel is the director of ERG (École de Recherche Graphique), "une école supérieure des arts" (ESA) in Brussels. The sixth member of the reading community, Livia Piazza, is present via an online connection. She is an independent researcher, dramaturg and producer (of work by for example Ant Hampton and Francesca Grilli), and lectures at the Università Bocconi. During the meeting, the computer screen is turned towards the group, so that Livia can join us in the discussion and help us to choose the book to be read and annotated.

The reading community seems to share a certain engagement. The books that are put on the table testify to this. Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* is suggested several times, but in the end, we opt for the book *Spartakus*. *The*

Symbology of Revolt by Furio Jesi. The title of the book, *Spartakus*, refers to the Spartakus League, a Marxist revolutionary movement that rose up in Germany on 29 December 1918, calling for an end to class struggle by the bourgeoisie. More than 500,000 Berliners took to the streets in January 1919 for massive demonstrations, also known as the *Spartakusaufstand* or Spartakus uprising. However, the revolt was quashed by the police and anti-communist paramilitary troops. Several leaders of the Spartakus League were killed. Key figure in this uprising is Rosa Luxemburg.

Not only does the book on revolt resonate remarkably well with the umbrella theme of the May Events, the festival in which this *Notes*-project is embedded; we are also triggered by the fact that one chapter of the book, “The Suspension of Historical Time”, was featured in the dOCUMENTA (13) *Book of Books*, a collection of essays accompanying the art works at the arts fair curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev in 2012. Andrea Cavalletti, who introduces the text, calls it “a true phenomenological investigation of revolt” (432). Jesi’s essay obviously supported the curator’s perspective of dOCUMENTA (13), turning the cities of Kassel, Kabul, Alexandria and Banff into an exhibition space inseparable from politics.

We are also triggered by the book’s cover text, announcing that Jesi draws on a deep reserve of literary sources like Bertolt Brecht, Eliade, Dostoyevsky and Thomas Mann. I particularly look forward to reading Jesi’s comments on Brecht and his political theatre. Jesi’s chapter on Rosa Luxemburg particularly triggers Laurence and Róise, who are very much into gender studies. This book seems to be connecting the dots between the members of the reading community. *Spartakus* seems to be the best option, the best common ground to start from.



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(-10) Ghent,
Monday 26 Feb 2018
FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE
BOOK.

Roise and I meet at the railway station in Ghent at 11.56 am. to exchange the book. At 12.05, I have to catch the train back to Zottegem. There goes my good intention to take the time to meet the other annotators. I failed to meet Roise yesterday evening in Voozuit. So, I have to travel today, between Zottegem and Ghent.

I manage to catch the train back at 12.05... .

Just imagine, me running like a fool to the meeting point, grabbing the book, taking a selfie with Roise and the book, running back to gate six, bumping into fellow travellers bumping into a student of mine, shouting, 'I got the book', 'I got the book', his puzzled gaze, a bit amused, me

stumbling over my feet,
onto the escalator,
into the train.
All in less than ten
minutes.

[Proud of myself]

The rhythm of the train
lowers my heartbeat.
Alone with the book.

" SPARTAKUS " it says

in capital letters

THE SYMBOLY OF REVOLT

by FURIO JESI

Arrows point to the
right



and to the
left



in red, yellow
and black, on a cream
white cover. I think of
the arrow of time,
driving us fast forward,
of the compulsory
nature of directives,
imperatives, orders.

AN IDEA STARTS TO GROW

-10 -8 AN IDEA STARTS TO GROW

what if I would keep track of my thoughts while reading the book write the future annotator to follow my meandering thoughts through a network of arrows

QUESTION: WHAT AM I READING FOR? WHAT AM I ANNOTATING FOR? WHY DO I DESIRE PEOPLE TO FOLLOW MY MARGIN THOUGHTS? CAN I TRANSFORM THE COMPULSORY NATURE OF A ONE-DIRECTION ARROW INTO A NETWORK?

MAYBE I SHOULD ALSO PROVIDE A SHORT-CUT A WAY OUT

I notice that the book called **SPARTAKUS** refers to many literary sources. The Notes-project not only gives me the time to spend with a book, but also the opportunity to give in to my hunger for beautiful words, to cultivate my love for words.

TO READ (RE)READ MY

- Bertolt Brecht
- dagboeken 1920-1922
- Getzammel in de nacht
- Georg Büchner
- The Hessian Messenger (1834)
- Verzameld werk
- Rosa Luxemburg
- De Russische revolutie
- Thomas Mann
- Doctor Faustus
- Ezwin Piscator
- The Political Theatre
-

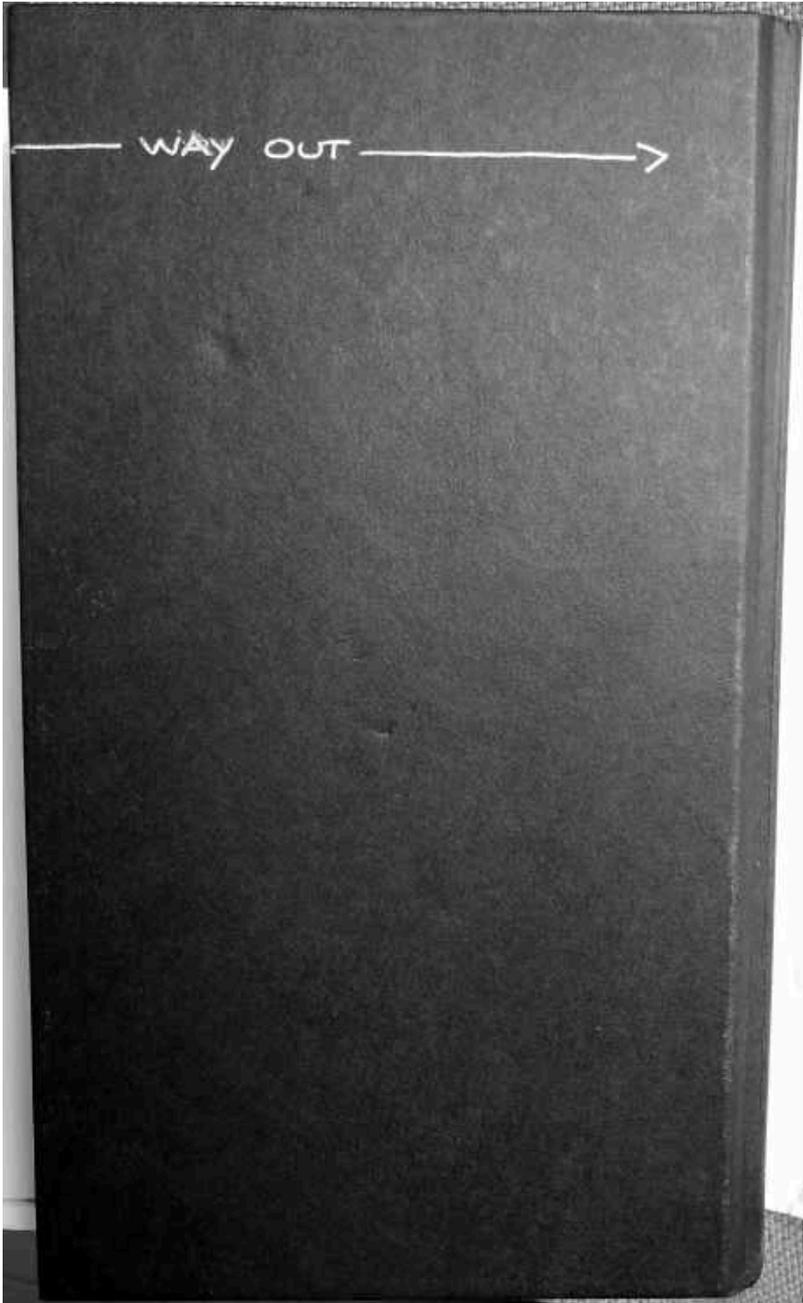
BOOKS

CHRISTEL'S BOOK THE ITALIAN LIST

* not the moral good! but the spiritual vitality



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-6 WEDNESDAY 28 Feb. 2018

Library of
Zotegem and
Heuzele belong
at home in the
afternoon

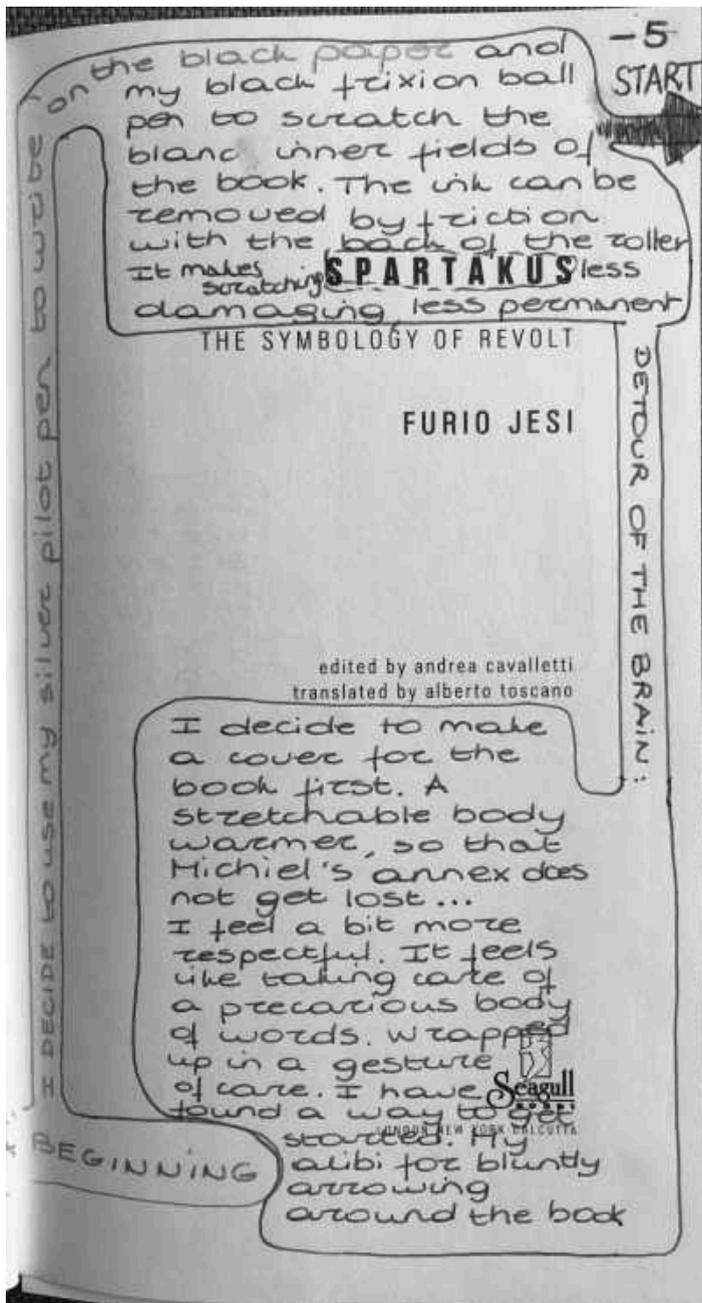
I am hesitant to start
writing in the book. I
recall Ivana Müller
explaining to us that
book is like a body; it
got a spine, a back, a
front, a smell, a taste.
It's much more visceral
than a flat screen.
Maybe that's why I
am so reluctant to
start annotating,
carving my pen in the
soft tissue of the
paper. However, Ivana
also observed that this
reluctance is part of
our culture, & the
authority we tend
to give to the text.

IT TAKES COURAGE TO MAKE A
" YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION? "

I DECIDE TO USE MY SILVER PILOT PEN TO WRITE
ON THE
BEGINNING

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and Thoma
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The Mythological Machine of Nazi Pseudo-Myths

Spartakus. The Symbolology of Revolt is an Italian essay, written by Furio Jesi in the second half of the twentieth century. It investigates the distorting and dangerous consequences of political events and figures that are being mythologized throughout history. A hero, bestowed with mythological qualities, is alienated from his persona. Myths are technicized into a mythological machine. Jesi explains that a myth is “technicized” when it has become an “instrumental distortion of ancient mythologemes for the purpose of political propaganda” (in Cavalletti 3). The connecting religious and ritual function of the myth has made way for “only obscure, and often trivial, falsifications of myth”, with the intention of influencing the masses (3). To put it in Georges Sorel’s words: the myths are “trimmed for the masses” (in Cavaletti 4). In contrast to the connecting value of myth, creating a common ground, the mythological machine claims to provide a collectivity, but only proves to be empty, full of hollow words.¹ In dark Nazi times, for example, the collective experience of myth was transformed into pseudo-myths of hygiene and purity.

Jesi elaborates on Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* to explain the devastating effects of the mythological machine. *Doctor Faustus* tells the story of the (fictional) German composer Adrian Leverkühn, who, just like the mythical Faust, bargains his soul in exchange for twenty-four years of creative genius. Written during and in the aftermath of the Second World War, this novel reflects on the political, artistic and religious turmoil in Germany at the time. However, it is not Mann’s re-shaping and re-telling of the Faust legend that interests Jesi the most; it is the demythologizing voice of narrator Serenus Zeitblom, Leverkühn’s friend, which attracts his attention.

Zeitblom is very sceptical about the academics, poets and scientists that gather in the salon to discuss the state of affairs in their country. He observes how the “distracting discussion evenings in the Schwabin apartment of a certain Sixtus Kridwiss” (Mann, *Doctor Faustus* 510) fill him “with fear and dread, yes, even horror on certain things” (413). He describes, amongst others, Dr. Chaim Breisacher, the lover of paradox (353), the rich industrialist and Rhineland paper-manufacturer Bullinger (291), the literary scholar Georg Vogler, art historian and Dürer-expert professor Gilgen Holzschuher, and professor of Philosophy and Palaeozoology Egon Unruhe. He distrusts Unruhe’s “sublimated Darwinism”, a dangerous combination of a ‘profound’ knowledge of geological periods and fossilization with the interpretation and scientific verification of a store of primitive sagas. “Everything there became true and real, though a sophisticated humanity had long since ceased to believe it” (524).

Leverkühn's friend also distrusts the perverse charm and verbal power of the fanatical poet Daniel Zur Hoöge, dressed "in a black buttoned-up frock coat" – a "priestly garment" (Mann 718). His poem, *Proclamations*, is "a lyrical and rhetorical outburst of riotous terrorism" (525).

The signatory to these proclamations was an entity named Christus Imperator Maximus, a commanding energyman who levied troops prepared to die for the subjection of the globe. He promulgated messages like Order of the Day, stipulated abandonedly ruthless conditions, proclaimed poverty and chastity, and could not do enough in the hammering, fistpounding line to exact unquestioned and unlimited obedience. 'Soldiers,' the poem ended, 'I deliver you to plunder the World!' (525)

In Leverkühn's observations, Jesi not only reads a critique of militaristic and totalitarian ideas, but also of the "intellectual complacency" that was "so characteristic of the intellectual atmosphere of the time" (Mann 212; 218). He praises Mann's critique on the scornful, superior know-all attitude of the gathered intellectuals and the "mighty apparatus of scientific witness" they invoke (529). In his polemic against the proliferation of Nazi pseudo-myths, and against 'intellectuals' being blind and indifferent to the mythological machine of these Nazi pseudo-myths, Jesi demands a pedagogics that does away with hierarchical know-all attitudes. To him, these hierarchies are "nothing but expressions of the extant social order, separating men and keeping them in a state of slumber" (in Cavalletti 11).

Revolutionary Ideas Trapped in The Mythological Machine

Following Jesi, not only militaristic and totalitarian ideas are developed in the mythological machine. Also revolutionary ideas run the risk of being trapped in a mythological machine. When subversive ideas crystallize and merely serve an ideological formula, they are submitted to the (bourgeois) law of imitation. Transformed into an idea to follow, the ideas as bearers of novelty lose their subversive force (Jesi 24-25). The mobile reality grounded in the daily experience becomes a paradigm. It becomes an exemplary mirror, in which the reflecting contours of a flat (heroic) image prescribe the behaviour of all members of the collective. The idea becomes a single 'truth'. However, these flat mirror images are devoid of flesh, the individuals are not really connected on common ground, the collective is an empty vessel.

MIRROR - SUBMISSION TO THE LAW OF
PISCATOR: ETERNAL RETURN

"In lieu of private themes
we had generalization,
in lieu of what was
special the typical,
in lieu of accident
causality. Decorative-
ness gave way to
constructedness, Reason
was put on a par
with Emotion, while
sensuality was
replaced by
didacticism and
fantasy by docu-
mentary reality!"

Piscator in 1929,
cited by John Willett
The Theatre of Erwin
Piscator, 1978, p107.

onym for lying. Yet its fortunes closely resemble those of
the word 'myth' which today enjoys an excellent reputa-
tion in the bourgeois world. When is
Greek word

Following Jesi, social realism in general and Erwin Piscator's Proletarian Theatre in particular failed in its genuine subversive value, because it allowed the mythological machine to run full speed. Subversive ideas crystallized into an ideology become truth, leaving no space for contestation or discussion (34-35). Piscator's political theatre provided an ideological formula as propaganda.

My annotations shift from underlining summarizing keywords to meandering personal thoughts and remarks. Instead of trying to understand Jesi's ideas, I start to develop my own ideas.

In his publication *Das Politische Theater* (1929) Piscator describes how he aims at empowering the *Proletariat* by means of his revolutionary political theatre. The proletarian masses were to be bonded in a totalized unity through the plays staged at the *Proletarische Volksbühne*, founded in collaboration with the writer Hans Rehfisch, and later in his own Piscator-Bühne (Piscator Theatre) at the Nollendorfplatz. United by communist propaganda, they would be ready for direct action. Piscator employed many optical and acoustic effects to obtain this goal. Didacticism and documentary reality are the key words in his revolutionary theatre:

In lieu of private themes we had generalisation, in lieu of what was special the typical, in lieu of accident causality. Decorativeness gave way to constructedness, Reason was put on a par with Emotion, while sensuality was replaced by didacticism and fantasy by documentary reality. (Piscator in Willett 107)

Staging *Fahnen* (*The Flags*), a drama by Alfons Paquet in 1924, Piscator developed such a documentary reality. In nineteen episodic scenes, Piscator stages the Chicago Anarchist Trial of 1886. The audience members are directly involved in the staged historical event, as they are appointed as members of the jury. They have to decide on the fate of four of the defendants being convicted of the killing of seven police officers in Hay Market on 2 May 1886. In reality, the four were hanged. In Piscator's play, the jury is prompted to bring class justice. Newspaper cuttings, telegrams, photographs and titles, such as THE POLICE THREW THE BOMBS THEMSELVES, are presented to the audience (functioning as jury), projected on large screens. Piscator puts the struggle against the capitalist exploitation at the heart of the affair. The demand for an eight-hour working day by the immigrants resonates with the contemporaneous struggle of labourers in the Weimar republic. As Piscator himself indicated in *The*

Political Theatre: “A didactic play (*Lehrstück*) was developed from the spectacle play (*Schaustück*)” (75). Jesi would regret this didactic stance as the subversive force of the novel or revolutionary idea is crystallized into an ideological formula, submitted to a hierarchical didacticism. The ‘simple’ men are taught the truth in *The Flags*. This ‘truth’, however, is “a relative truth”, “limited to the consciousness and experience of the followers of the political movement which originated the propaganda” (Jesi 36). From this perspective, Piscator does not differ that much from the arrogant, complacent intellectuals in Thomas Mann’s novel; his didactic, know-all attitude renders him blind to the spellbinding force of the mythological machine and its symbols of power.

Keeping in mind “a rigorous awareness of the relativity of the propagated truths” (36), the big challenge, then is, “to keep revolt alive” and mobile, “living from within an uninterrupted battle” (in Cavalletti 19). A way out of the mythological machine is to draw more on the crystallizing modalities inaugurating didactic and political manipulation. Where does the dialectic of contestation come to a standstill? When do words no longer encourage discussion? The individual needs the collective in order to be rescued from isolation. It takes memory and repetition to have revolt turn into a revolution. However, memory and continuity at the same time also stop the subversive force of ideas. This is a delicate balance.

In the margin of Jesi’s pedagogical demand aimed at tomorrow, I annotate the following words in capital letters: WHAT AM I TEACHING FOR?

On that same page, Jesi seems to respond:

A positive answer is legitimate only if it does not imply in the pedagogue the desire to propose those spiritual experiences as a medicine for contemporary humanity. (Jesi 155)

Demythologization is one of the key concepts in Jesi’s pedagogical demand. This does not mean to do away with myths altogether, as they have an important connecting value, but to shed, or better to sacrifice its “bourgeois components” (29).

not rely on deformed myths and that it had become, instead, an authentic language of truth.

interesting! take on the 'authentic' & belief?

VI. Spartakus

'[W]hoever wishe[s] to be part of the community must be prepared to jettison major portions of truth and science, to make the *sacrificium intellectus*.'¹⁶ In Chapter 34 of Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, these words sum up the attitude of the obliging German readers of Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* in the immediate wake of the First World War.¹⁷ Voicing that statement 30 years later, Mann directed his moral polemic mainly against the proliferation of Nazi pseudo-myths. But precisely in that same year of 1919, in which the novel places the apologies of Sorel's thought made at a gathering of the intelligentsia in Munich, the extreme part of the German Left took to the streets equipped with propagandistic techniques that derived from the reappraisal—or, rather, the renewed experience—of myths, myths in which one put one's trust as perennial reservoirs, latent in man, for the achievement of self-consciousness and the strengthening of the struggle against the capitalist system. The very denomination of *Spartakusbund* (League of Spartacus) reflects that confidence, evoking as it does the name and image of the ancient leader of the slave insurrection, even formally reconnecting the emblems of Spartacism to a seam of German culture that can be more easily grasped, at least for now, in its crystallized moments—in that *Illuminatenorden* (Order of the Illuminati) that Adam Weishaupt

BUT ALSO AGAINST SCHOLARS BEING INDIFFERENT TO THE POWER OF THESE PSEUDO-MYTHS

¹⁶ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 386.

¹⁷ Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (Jeremy Jennings ed. and Thomas Ernst Hulme trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Writing and Walking the City. From Individual Act to Connecting Revolt

In “Subversion and Memory”, Jesi calls the act of writing one of the most “self-involved of acts” (30) that nevertheless connects with the world, creating a common ground. The value of this “solitary existential relationship of the individual to ‘the others’” (30) lies in the potential of a subversive idea to connect with the world. Although writing is not a way of communicating in the strict sense of the term, the words are instruments directed to the outside. Rimbaud’s act of writing *Le bateau ivre*, for example, and after that offering it to the people of Paris, for that matter became an act of revolt the moment his self-realization as a human being and as a writer emerged as part of a collectivity, sharing a waking state regarding the bourgeois manipulation of life. “The instant of revolt determines one’s sudden self-realization and self-objectification as part of a collectivity” (Jesi 53) Distance is in that sense not the same as detachment. For the engaged writer (or reader), there is connectivity in distance. Even though it can take place in utter silence and isolation, writing and reading might shift from individual act to connecting revolt.

This self-realization of a human being as part of a collectivity also explains why it is only in the hour of revolt that a city is truly felt as your *own* city. It is the common ground of a shared battlefield that gives the solitary act of walking the city a collective character. The self-realization of a human being emerges in the shared moment of revolt, having much more impact than the sweet child memories you have of a city, playing in its streets or its houses, or strolling through it with a beloved one. (Jesi 2008, 40).

You can love a city, you can recognize its houses and its streets in your remotest or dearest memories; but only in the hour of revolt is the city really felt as your *own* city – your own because it belongs to the I but at the same time to the ‘others’; your own because it is a battlefield that you have chosen and the collectivity too has chosen; your own because it is a circumscribed space in which historical time is suspended and in which every act is valuable in and on itself, in its absolutely immediate consequences.

One appropriates a city by fleeing or advancing, charging and being charged, much more than by playing as a child in its streets or strolling through it with a girl. In the hour of revolt, one is no longer alone in the city. (Jesi 55)

In his own *Lettura del 'Bateau ivre' di Rimbaud* Giorgio Agamben referred to these lines as “one of the most beautiful things ever written on the relationship between the city and politics” (in Cavalletti 20).

Brecht's Berlin² clearly differs from Rimbaud's Paris. Jesi observes how “the grim reality of Berlin real estate (...)” looms “physically over the exploited class in every hour and every action of their lives” (72). Contrary to the battle of the Commune in Paris – “occupied and used, its bourgeois values deconsecrated by a people besieged” – the battle was fought in Berlin “through the freezing and darkened city” (Jesi 72). With its “granitic symbols”, Berlin was considered a “city of the boss”, and the battle in it “a fight against the citizen bosses, against the *bosses of the city*” (72). Jesi refers to Georg Heym's poems describing Berlin as a “menacing city”, expressing “the grim reality of Berlin real estate” (72).

The true nocturnal and snowy ‘hell’ – in nothing does the city, built by the bosses, show its solidarity with the rebels. It is the looming, stony symbol of the ‘monsters’ who will soon prevail. (Jesi 73)

Although Brecht likes the theatres in Berlin, he does not truly feel Berlin to be his own city. Shortly after his arrival, he writes on a postcard that he loves Berlin, “but with limited liability” (Brecht in a letter to Jacob Geis, Berlin, 29 February 1920. *Letters* 59). In Augsburg, Brecht spent a lot of time in the public reading room. The “fine gardens with benches and pergolas”, the “nice walks (...) in the woods” gave him “the greatest pleasure” (Brecht in a letter to the Reitter family, Augsburg, July 1913. *Letters* 17). The quietness in his birth place is in sharp contrast with “the ballyhoo” he experiences in Berlin (Brecht in a letter to Jacob Geis, Berlin, 29 February 1920. *Letters* 59). Later, in a diary note of 4th September 1921, he wonders “why nobody has yet described the big city as a jungle” (in Willett 1980, n 441). He points at “the hostility of the big city, its malignant stony consistency, its babylonean confusion of language” (in Willett 1980, 441).

The ‘romantic’ image of the city of Paris transforms into a cold setting in *The Jungle of Cities* (*Im Dickicht der Städte*, original working title *Garga*, 1921-1924). “My choice of an American setting”, writes Brecht, “is not, as has been frequently suggested, the result of a romantic disposition” (“On Looking Through My First Plays” 437). Although “the great city of Chicago” is explicitly mentioned in the subtitle as the place of action, Brecht's own experience of the ‘cold’ city of Berlin shines through the whole play. When Garga and his family move from the prairies to “this city of steel and dirt”, they are “freezing in the filth of this iron

city” (Brecht, *The Jungle of Cities* 157). The play relates the destruction of the family and is painfully suggestive of the extreme fragility of identity in the metropolis, also in revolutionary times. “I was unconsciously moving very close to the real struggle that was then taking place, though idealized by me, the class struggle (“On Looking Through My First Plays” 437). It seems that even in the hour of revolt, one is alone in the menacing city.

Jesi hardly mentions Brecht’s *Jungle of the Cities*, but analyzes in depth an earlier play of his, *Drums in the Night*. He regrets the observer’s detachment in this play, which refers to the nights of the winter of 1989-1919 and the revolts of Munich and Berlin (98). The character of Andreas Kragler, who in the end turns his back to the revolution, only hears the shots and screams of the Spartacist revolt in the distance. Jesi regrets this bracketing of the revolt of 1918-1919. Theatre scholar John Willett even goes as far to say that “there is no sign that Beckett was at all moved by these events in Munich and Berlin (*Letters* 14).

I disagree. The sounds of revolt may be distant for the character of Andreas Kragler, but this distance does not mean that Brecht himself was a detached writer, bracketing the revolt of 1918-1919. For sure, Brecht’s experience of the ‘cold’ city of Berlin at the time is not detached. His dialectics at work may not deliver a clear-cut propaganda, as is the case in Piscator’s political theatre, but it all the more shares a waking state regarding the spellbinding force of the mythological machine that might also entangle revolutionary ideas.

I reflect on the effect of Rimbaud’s and Brecht’s words on me. I reflect on the annotating practice, connecting the very private practice of reading with the critical reflections of the other annotators. Is revolt still lingering in between the words of Rimbaud and Brecht? I should not be naïve. Rimbaud’s writing was an act of revolt, but he did not unchain a revolution, not by walking a city, and not by writing a poem.³ Jesi’s terminological difference between ‘revolt’ and ‘revolution’ is of importance here.

A revolution implies a long-term strategy, and is entirely immersed in the advance of history, revolt is not only a sudden insurrectionary explosion but well and truly a ‘suspension’ of historical time. And it is in this suspension that true collective experience is liberated. (Cavaletti 14)

The difference between revolt and revolution should not be sought in their respective aims; they can both have the same aim – to seize power. What principally distinguishes revolt from revolution is, instead, a different experience of time. If, following the ordinary meaning of the two words, revolt is a sudden insurrectional explosion, which can be placed within a strategic horizon but which does not in itself imply a long-distance strategy, and revolution is a strategic complex of insurrectional movements, coordinated and oriented over the mid- to long term towards ultimate objectives, then we could say that revolt suspends historical time. It suddenly institutes a time in which everything that is done has a value in itself, independently of its consequences and of its relations with the transitory or perennial complex that constitutes history. Revolution would, instead, be wholly and deliberately immersed in historical time. (46)

Rimbaud's and Brecht's words did not unchain a revolution in themselves, but their words still connect with the world, creating a common ground, through one's self-realisation as a critical human being. As such, their words still have the potential of a subversive idea to connect with the world. As such, Jesi believes, the act of revolt lingers on in the staged representation, not in the sense of imitation, but in the sense of Nietzsche's eternal return. More than Piscator's didactic documentary theatre, the "dialectical function for staged representation" (42) provides a way out of the mythological machine. A moral strategy affirms mythical foundations. "But, in the externalization of that dialectic, symbols and myths come to reveal the precedents and conditionings determined by a 'once upon a time', which takes on divine or demonic features and against which the revolt acts" (Jesi 120). Kragler, who turns his back to the revolution in *Drums in the Night* is, paradoxically enough, in that sense also a moment of revolt in an uninterrupted battle (120).

In this context, of particular interest is Brecht's staged representation of the figure of Rimbaud in the character of Garga in *The Jungle of Cities*. In an early note on that play Brecht writes that "George Garga is like A. Rimbaud in appearance. He is essentially a German translation into American from the French" (Brecht, "Three Early Notes" 431).

Garga is a clerk, working behind a counter of C. Maynes' lending library in Chicago. The time of action is 18 August, 1912. Garga is approached by Shlink, a wealthy lumber dealer who wants to buy his opinion on a book. Garga replies that

he can get his opinion for nothing, which doesn't mean that his opinion is worth nothing. When Shlink insists on buying his opinion, Garga replies that he can buy the opinions of Arthur Rimbaud, for instance, but not his opinion of that book. Garga refuses Shlink's offers, does not want to "prostitute his soul", and chooses freedom. When Garga is fired, he grabs Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell* from the shelf and reads aloud the following words:

I inherit all the vices, idol worship, sacrilege, on, all the vices, lying, lust... I am an animal, a nigger. But maybe I'm saved. You are fake niggers, maniacs, wild men, misers, all of you. Businessman, you're a nigger; judge, you're a nigger; general, you're a nigger; president, you flea-bitten bastard, you're a nigger; you drink bootleg liquor from Satan's still. This great nation is driven by fever and cancer! (...) I've never been one of you, never been a Christian, I do not understand your laws. I have no moral sense, I'm a wild beast, a monster, you are making a mistake.. (Brecht, *In the Jungle of Cities* 128)

Shlink's request for a bargain with Garga to sell his opinion resonates with Goethe's *Faust*, just like in Thomas Mann's retelling of the story.⁴ However, in this cold city, books seem to be worth nothing. Worms, one of Shlink's accomplices, even exclaims: "Books! What good are books? You think a bookstore could have stopped the San Francisco earthquake?" In contrast with the bunch of intellectuals that gather at the salon in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, Garga is a humble book clerk in a library, who fights Shlink's "war of annihilation" (Brecht, "Three Early Notes" 431). Instead of being blind for the mythological machine, he is very much aware of its annihilating force. Kragler's refusal to follow a mythologized image of the revolution resonates for that matter with Garga's refusal to lose his individual voice and opinion in a (violent) collectivity. Garga, however, in the end becomes the nihilist version of Kragler. Despite his initial refusal to sell his opinions, he ends up being completely entrapped by capitalism.

While Jesi considers the long-term strategy of a revolution a necessary step, liberating "the true collective experience", (in Cavaletti 14), he is at the same time very critical about the particular functioning of time and memory in the creation of mythical heroes and heroines in service of (also revolutionary) ideologies. The 'mythological' concerns an idea as 'waking state' of a collective, having a single cosmos to share, that is a single world in which all members of the collective participate together. The technicized myth, however, concerns not such an idea, but a myth that is intentionally invoked to serve an ideology. As such, it actually does not have a collective character, as it mainly serves the benefits of those who

technicize the myth. A mythological machine is at work, where subversive ideas run the risk of becoming crystallized ideas, serving only an ideological formula. To demythologize is also a matter of “preventing the genuine myths of the exploited class from giving rise to a mythological system.” (Jesi 74). It is a matter of “acting critically”; rather than blindly imitating (power) structures. As Jesi aptly points out: “The collectively organized realities of the exploited become ever less collective, to the degree that they imitate the structures proper to the class of the exploiters” (73). This call for critical awareness does not only concern the organizations of class, parties or unions, but the organization of any institution, also institutions organizing knowledge.

Afterthoughts, Friday 9 March 2018, in the train on my way to Paris

The annotating project runs to its end. I go through the book once more.

In the margin of page 4 and page 39 in Jesi’s *Spartakus*, I expressed my disdain for the arrogant ‘I-know-all-attitude’ and the hierarchical distance displayed by the scholars described by Leverkühn’s friend in Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*. I was triggered to read *Doctor Faustus* again and in the margins of my copy, I wrote in capital letters: “I DO NOT WANT TO BE A SCHOLAR LIKE THIS”.

I reflect on the institution in which I work.

Coincidentally, I used post-its with the Ghent University logo to write my larger annotations. Using these post-its, I unconsciously affirmed my affiliation with the institution. While the white background logo on the blue post-its might not have been visible from the beginning, I deliberately coloured it when my margin thoughts concerned pedagogics, so that the logo was foregrounded. This illustrates my growing awareness of the functioning of symbols in pedagogical institutions.

During the annotation process, Jesi’s study of myths and symbols of power triggered observations of a more general character, beyond the specific references to the French and German revolutionary situation. While reading Jesi’s symbology, or study on “symbols and signs in whose epiphanies and presences we are implicated by the act of writing” (30), I became very much aware that, whenever I conduct my solitary and very individual act of writing academic articles, I relate to the collective of the University through the (obligatory) use of its logo. While annotating Jesi, I understood how my individual writing space expands through the logo, becomes “the symbolic space common to an entire collective, the shelter from historical time in which the collective finds

safety” (53). In Naomi Klein’s words, the university logo creates a familiar togetherness in “logo tribes” (327).

The university’s symbol – and identity – is protected by strict style guides and trademark rules. Following the UGent style guide, the copyrighted standard logo is to be used in colour – blue on a white or transparent background – whenever we speak or write with a direct link to Ghent University. In this article, I use the copyrighted black version for black/white printing. Also following the UGent



style guide, we are not allowed to split the logo, separating the image from the text. The style guide refers to the legal department of UGent, if we are in doubt about the correct use of the logo.

The logo is obviously serious business; the university’s carefully constructed identity throughout history is at stake. This identity concerns independent thought. When the university opened on 9 October 1817, it was a State University. To stress its autonomy, an Aula Academia was erected in 1826. The Aula was considered a place of importance, as all the ritual ceremonies were to be taking place there. Its imposing neoclassical edifice was designed by the city architect Louis Roelandt and radiated autonomous *grandeur*. Until then, the ritual ceremonies took place in venues that belonged to the city. As an autonomous, ‘modern’ scientific institution, the university thought it beneath its dignity to have to share a ceremonial venue with other institutions and associations.

The evolution of the university logo throughout history confirms this proliferation of autonomy and independent thinking. The original logo of Ghent University contains an escutcheon, a privilege granted by the Sovereign at the

time, King William I. On the escutcheon, the lion of the Ghent escutcheon is depicted, and an image of Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, accompanied by two laurel branches. Above the escutcheon is the Dutch crown. Beneath, a Latin motto reads 'INTER UTRUMQUE', which means 'in between both', indicating that this institution of knowledge serves the king and its duty to pursue knowledge. When Belgium became an independent country in 1830, the Dutch crown disappeared from the logo. In 1988, the logo changed completely. Ghent University let go of the escutcheon and the image of the aula was considered as a worthy successor of the figure of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom. It exemplified the university's independent thinking, but also its *grandeur*, with the temple façade with seven pillars hinting at a classical tradition. As the official website of UGent observes, the image contains "the most pure but also the most recognizable forms of the auditorium: the stereobate, the columns, the entablature and the pediment".

Escutcheon of Ghent University with the crown of William I, the lion of the



Ghent escutcheon and the goddess of wisdom and knowledge Minerva
(Ghent University Archive)



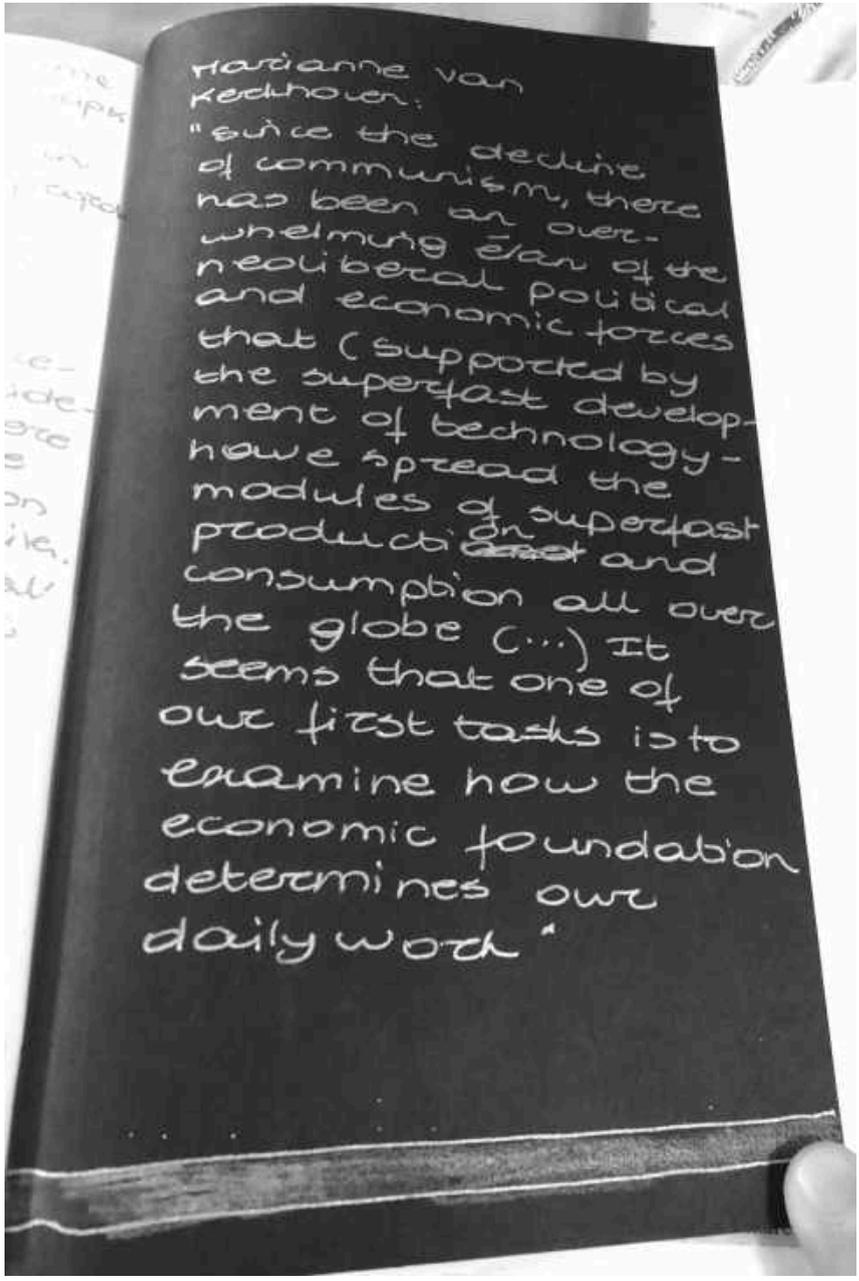
Drawing of the Aula's façade
(Ghent University Archive)



Design of the Aula's façade by Louis Roelandt.
The pediment was never realized
(Ghent University Archive)

Recently, UGent has added a motto to the logo on the university homepage. DARE TO THINK!, emphasizes not only the value of high-quality teaching, and its pedagogical mission, but also its “critical stance on society”, delivering critically thinking students. The Dare to Think label is announced on the UGent-website as a “flexible framework that makes the reader think. We show that you can also think outside the box. That things are not always as they seem”.

On one of the last pages of Jesi's book, I annotate the following words by dramaturg Marianne Van Kerkhoven:



Marianne van
 Kesteren:
 "since the decline
 of communism, there
 has been an over-
 whelming élan of the
 neoliberal political
 and economic forces
 that (supported by
 the superfast develop-
 ment of technology-
 howe spread the
 modules of superfast
 production ~~and~~ ^{on} and
 consumption all over
 the globe (...). It
 seems that one of
 our first tasks is to
 examine how the
 economic foundation
 determines our
 daily work."

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I consider these words throughout the history that I shared with the university.

It seems to me that universities aspire independent thought, but that – at the same time – it becomes more and more difficult to resist the pressure of marketing philosophy. The rise of disaster capitalism, as Naomi Klein calls it, also affects universities. In neoliberal times, scholars are pressed to produce too much, too fast. How to find the time to think, considering that symbolic capital and financial capital run at different speeds? Considering that quantity is more easily achieved than quality? How to remain a gatekeeper of quality research and novel ideas?

How to share the time for an idea to grow?

How to share the time it takes?

Klein's critic of unfettered capitalism worldwide, together with Jesi's writings on revolt, inspire me to make a beginning for change myself. I could call it an act of revolt, "a fight against velocity", as Van Kerkhoven calls it (8), challenging the traditional pedagogics and the marketized work-flow in universities, a fight for time that can and may be spoiled.

I screen my own teaching practice, how I grade students, how I produce and transmit knowledge...

How to engage in a pedagogics that moves beyond hierarchical didactics? How to draw on the crystallizing modalities inaugurating didactic manipulation, leaving no space for subversive ideas? How to spur a dialectic of dissensus within the institution of knowledge? How to prevent a state of slumber for the spellbinding neoliberal machine and its symbols of power? I return to Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's quote on note-taking in the beginning of this contribution, and on her link with diagrammatic thinking and their speculative potential. Indeed, speculative thinking is diagrammatic in the sense that it moves away from linear thinking, usually in pursuit of a single truth. Speculative thinking progresses through a nonlinear dynamics. It diverges from predictable, anticipated outcomes in thinking and considers "*investigation* as indefinite elaboration" (Merleau-Ponty 7). It involves the beginning of something new, of unpredictable directions of thinking. Speculative thinking prevents common ground from becoming commonsense in which dissensus is barred.

Slowly, an idea emerges. A new – maybe subversive – idea starts to grow.

Next academic year (2018-2019), I teach *Repertoire Study of Theatre* at the Arts Department of Ghent University. This course aims at acquiring a historical and critical insight into the repertoire of canonical western modern theatre authors. I offer a critical approach towards the canon-building discourse, from the perspective of Gender Studies, Postcolonial Studies, etc. I am thinking of having the students explore the repertoire in a different way than by means of a preselected reading list.

I intend to set up a *Notes*-project with the students in the next *Repertoire*-course. In our first meeting, the students will gather as reading community, deciding on the drama texts, books and scripts to read themselves. Much like in Ivana Müller's *Notes*-project, they will take turns in reading the chosen books (the difference with Müller's *Notes*-project being that we will read several books), having a maximum of two weeks to read and annotate the book and to hand it over to the next annotator. Ivana Müller's annotating procedures will be on the table as our guideline.

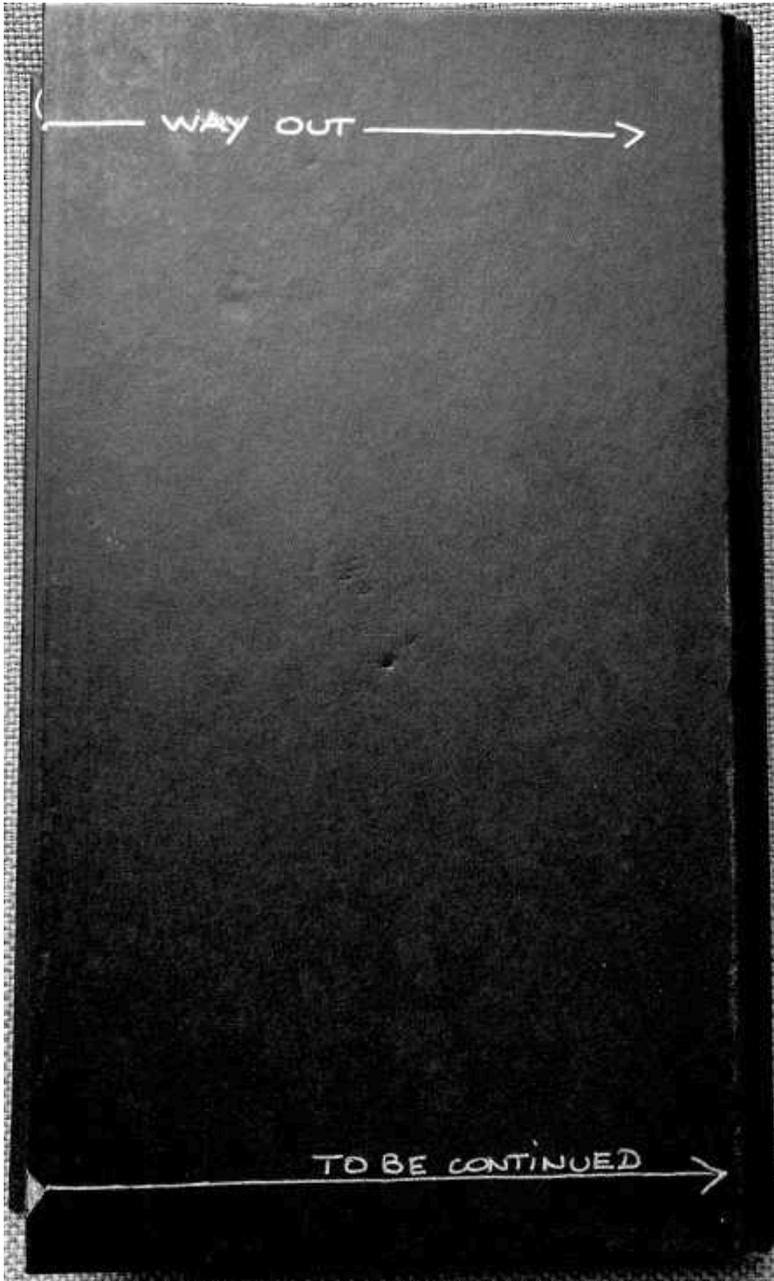
With the students keeping track of their thoughts, comments and doubts in the margins, and accumulating these thoughts with each new reader, I hope to unfold another pedagogics with the students; not one in which “the process of learning is little more than the transferring of ‘stuff’ to a student’s brain” (Klein 92).

The idea of the project is to create a practice for a collective reading and writing that allows a frame for sharing of a certain common, for anticipating and imagining the “other”, and for developing new possible individual and collective narratives and associations with a book as a starting point. (Ivana Müller, *Invitation Annotators 1*)

I hope to spur a diagrammatical, speculative thinking, to inaugurate a processual investigation, without a predictable outcome, but with the dynamics of an indefinite elaboration. As for the grades, there will be no paper to be written, no Power Point Presentation to be delivered. Much as in the ‘original’ *Notes*-project, a public event will connect the private act of annotating with the broader collective of the university and its motto ‘Dare to Think!’ I hope to share a waking state regarding the predictability of hierarchical didactics and the dumbfounding potential of the neoliberal mythological machine.

I consider these annotated books as treasures of thought, being part of a larger art-project, emanating from Ivana Müller's *Notes*-project. As such, I also intend to have a small exhibition running in the atelier of the Vandenhove Centre for Architecture and Art, connecting the student's speculative thinking with the world. All the annotated books will be on display. Maybe Ivana Müller will accept my invitation to attend the opening of the exhibition.

To be continued...



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¹ “une machine qui fait croire qu’elle dissimule un myth mais se mesure à l’ampleur de ses effets qui renvoient tous au vide qui l’habite.” “la machine mythologique est en réalité vide (ou seulement pleine d’elle-même, ce qui revient au même)”. Jesi, *Lecture du Bateau ivre* de Rimbaud 32; 43.

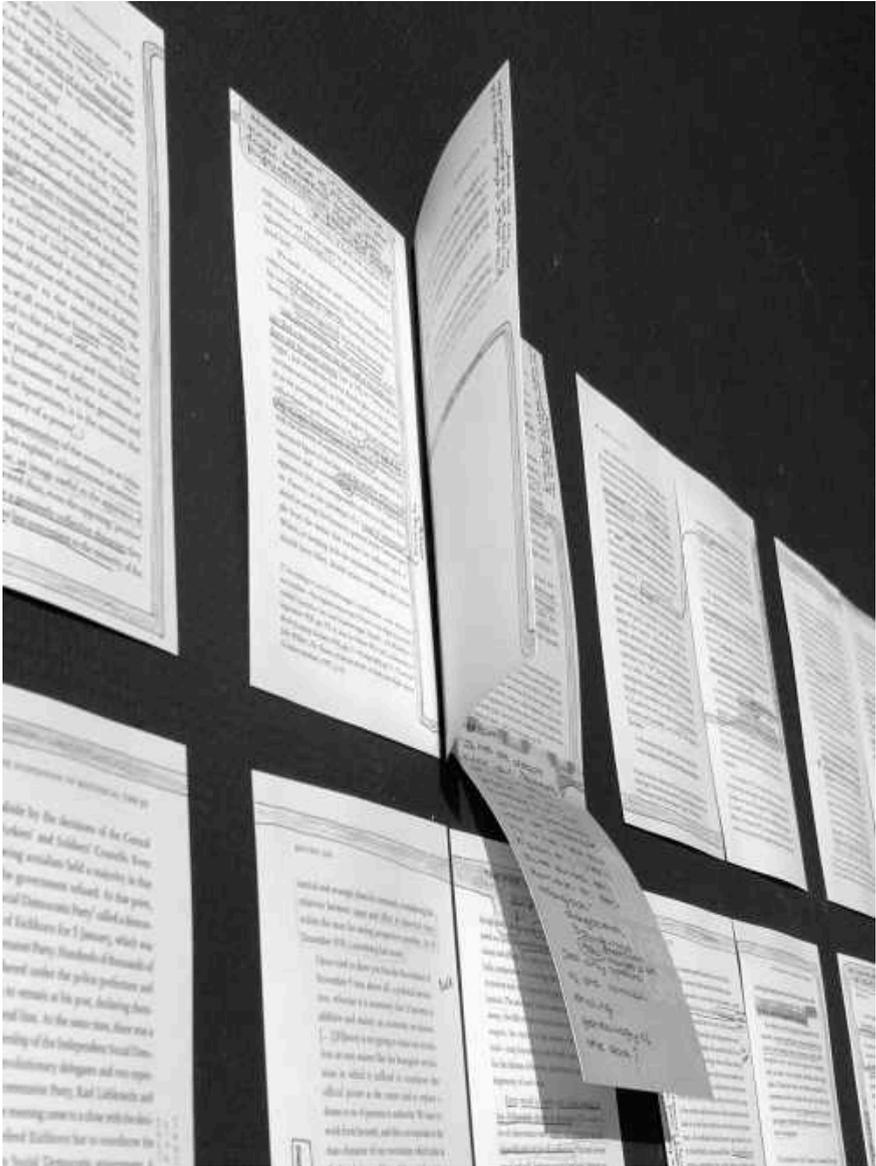
² Brecht visited Berlin for a first time in 1920, after having left his birthplace Augsburg to study in München at the age of twenty. He returned to Berlin in 1924 and lived there until 1933.

³ “Rimbaud pouvait être le prophète d’une révolte, mais pas celui d’une révolution” (Jesi “*Lecture du Bateau ivre* de Rimbaud 39).

⁴ Goethe’s *Faust* was discussed in detail in a long letter to his friend Caspar Neher in 1915. Neher made a colour sketch of the apparition of Faust, but Brecht disagreed with his view on the apparition. He thought Neher exaggerated the treatment of light in the sketch, conveying “an extraordinary poetic mood” (20). He would prefer a much more realistic handling of light, as “a poet (...) is dependent on reality” (Brecht in a letter to Caspar Neher, Augsburg, 10 November 1914, *Letters* 20).



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NOTES (2016/17/18...)

The concept of **Notes** is inspired by the 19th century practice of 'marginalia', which cultivated a gesture of "personalizing" a book before offering it to a friend or a lover by writing notes in the margin. Inspired by this practice Ivana Müller invited **Bojana Kunst, Paz Rojo, David Weber-Krebs, Paula Caspão, Ant Hampton** and **Jonas Rutgeerts** into a collaborative artistic process based on gestures of reading and writing.

All the participants in the project chose a book together: ***Echolalias, On the Forgetting of Language*** by Daniel Heller-Roazen. They read the same copy of the book one after the other, during a 5 month period, and while reading they wrote their notes in the margin. The body of the « noted book » traveled between different European cities (Berlin-Frankfurt-Rome-Lisbon-Paris-Madrid-Brussels) where the participants live or work, becoming a body of exchange, a body of influence, a territory of reflection, a common place. Through this process they questioned the idea itself of reading, of sharing a certain common, of anticipating the "other", and of creating new possible narratives and associations with the book as a starting point.

The annotated version of the book thus became an archive of a long process of collective reading and writing, through which the 7 readers created a hybrid-manuscript.

The whole process of reading started after an invitation to the project Heritage Depot, organized by **Theater Freiburg** and **Museum für Neue Kunst Freiburg**, Germany, 25/03 - 01/05 2017. The installation showed in the exhibition is based on some of the issues and questions related to the practices of **Notes**. This possible representation of the annotated book contains a display on the wall of all of the 291 facsimiled pages of the annotated book, page by page, and in the same order as they appear in the book, creating a certain sort of a 'dissected map' through which the visitor can wonder, either alone or in a group with the other visitors, listening to the 11 hour long audio document of 7 annotators reading

the book, chapter by chapter, one after the other.

Once being annotated the book itself continues its life as a book, outside of official institutions, traveling from reader to reader, each reader choosing the following one, giving her/him the book by hand. **The book's journey will last for the next 10 years**, crossing many hands and taking unpredictable paths driven by chance, trust and gestures of friendship. A log of all readers will be kept on these web pages as part of an archive, slowly tracing the cartographies of the emerging reading community.

spring 2018

NOTES / MAY EVENTS

Another book in the *Notes* series is being annotated at this moment and will be presented in **Kunstenfestivaldesarts** in Brussels and in **Vooruit** in Gent as a part of the **May Events** project. The book chosen for its context is *Spartakus, the Symbology of Revolt* by Furio Jesi and the annotators are Maxime Arnould, Roise Goan, Livia Piazza, Laurence Rassel, Christel Stalpaert and Michiel Vandevelde. The documentation of the book will be exhibited from 16 till 20 th of May at INSAS in Brussels and from 23 till 26 in Vooruit in Gent. With the public presentation, with all the annotators, in Brussels on the 19th of May and Gent on the 26th of May.

On 18/05 as a part of this project IM will give a workshop for the art students of INSAS and others. In this short encounter she will share some ideas, methods and questions around the issue of collective writing, here meant as a general term for different sorts of practices in which a group of people articulates thoughts together.

Implementatie van het Notes-project in het onderwijs

Concept: Ivana Müller

Implementatie: Christel Stalpaert en Jasper Delbecke

Annotators: Camilla Arscone, Astrid Bonte, Ester Bosschaert, Nikolaas Boucquey, Anthony Brynaert, Klara Camerlinck, Basil Canoo, Karlijn Clocheret, Jade De Baere, Leda Decleyre, Marie De Graeve, Charlotte Deprez, Alice De Waele, Charlotte Dewilde, Simon Dhont, Lore Duvivier, Nora Flamen, Bavo Guilbert, Juliet Hoornaert, Helena Huvenne, Margot Jansens, Jasmien Lagae, Roosje Mestdagh, Siebren Nachtergaele, Elisa Palm, Quinten Pouliart, Riana Roets, Leonie Rohlfing, Aike Roodenburg, Manou Selhorst, Elizabeth Tack, Mo Van Acker, Anthony Van Caeneghem, Heleen Vanhoutte, Kaisa Vannimmen, Nina Van Praet, Kato Wilms, Greta Zambonin, Hannah Zaouad

There's so much more to a book than just the reading.

(Maurice Sendak)



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Notes bij Repertoirestudie van het theater

Christel Stalpaert implementeerde samen met Jasper Delbecke het *Notes*-project in de cursus 'Repertoirestudie van het theater' (eerste semester academiejaar 2018-2019) Tijdens de eerste les kwamen de studenten als "reading community" samen en bepaalden zij zelf de lijst van boeken / drama's / scenario's die zij zouden lezen en annoteren volgens de annotatie-richtlijnen van choreografe Ivana Müller. In haar *Notes*-grijpt Müller terug naar de 19^e-eeuwse praktijk van 'marginalia', waarbij gedachten en kritische bemerkingen in de marge van een boek werden geannoteerd voor de toekomstige lezer(s). Die praktijk bracht Müller terug tot leven door mensen uit te nodigen om samen één boek te kiezen, te lezen, te annoteren en door te geven aan elkaar.

Het *Notes*-project verliep binnen *Repertoirestudie van het theater* in 8 groepen studenten die volgens een strak rotatiesysteem gedurende tien lesweken aantekeningen aanbrachten in de marge van telkens vier à vijf boeken. Het aantal boeken was gelijk aan het aantal studenten in de groep, wat hen telkens twee weken annotatie-tijd gaf. De aantekeningen staan soms in relatie tot de gedoceerde hoor- en gastcolleges, maar getuigen even vaak of zelfs vaker over de praktijk van het annoteren zelf. Aangezien in het vak 'repertoirestudie van het theater' kritisch gereflecteerd wordt over de vigerende machtsmechanismen binnen de vorming van de westerse theatercanon, weerklinkt in de annotatie vaak het perspectief van gender, globalisering en interculturaliteit. Naast het repertoire van gevestigde waarden lag er overigens even goed spraakmakend werk van jonge schrijvers op tafel.

De tentoonstelling *Notes - Wereldwijd Netwerk van Woorden* die feestelijk opende op donderdag 20 december 2018 toonde het resultaat van dit *Notes*-project en werd gerealiseerd in het atelier van het Vandenbrouwe - Centrum voor Kunst & Architectuur. Ook Ivana Müller was tijdens de opening (via Skype) aanwezig en ging in gesprek met de studenten. Deze portfolio brengt verslag uit van dit publiek event.



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INTIMACY

Mo Van Acker, Basill Cannoo, Kaisa Vernimmen, Margot Janssen, Aike Roodenburg

Samuel Beckett - Wachten op Godot

Henrik Ibsen - Poppenhuis

Ramsey Nasr - De Andere Stem

Tony Kushner - Angels in America

Frank Wedekind - Spring Awakening

"Het uitwisselen van de boeken werd voor ons een moment om met elkaar in gesprek te gaan over onze ervaringen tijdens het annotatiesysteem. Het intieme van het samen lezen en annoteren werd vormgegeven in een draaiend huis dat vier lees- en annotatiekamers van de deelnemers verbeeldt. De ruimte is overwoekerd met Notes die ook daadwerkelijk uit de geannoteerde boeken komen. De bezoeker kan desgewenst ook de audio-opnamen van al onze gesprekken beluisteren. Vragen die ons bezighielden tijdens de voorbereiding van de tentoonstelling waren: 'Hoe dicht mogen de andere mensen komen in het 'lezen' van ons intieme proces van lezen en annoteren?'. Wij willen de grens tussen private en publieke ruimte voelbaar houden. Daarom ook is de stem in de audio-opnamen losgekoppeld van het individu. We zeggen ook heel weinig de titel van het boek in onze conversaties. Daarom ook zijn de Notes door de vele overlappingsen niet echt meer leesbaar. Een aangenaam bij-effect was dat onze Notes begonnen uit te lopen door de gebruikte lijm. De bezoeker blijft een buitenstaander die even meeluistert en meekijkt, maar niet alles kan begrijpen."

When we started participating in the *Notes* project it, very soon, became clear that we wanted to focus on the social aspect of annotating a text. The process behind the marginalia. How does writing in a book, writing a subtext in relation to text, affect the writer? Intimacy before content. We posed questions like: "How do we feel about invading, impairing and deconstructing a book?", "How do our very own points of view relate (or not relate) to each other when reading a text that has been annotated before?", "How does the conversion from private reading to collective reading take form?"

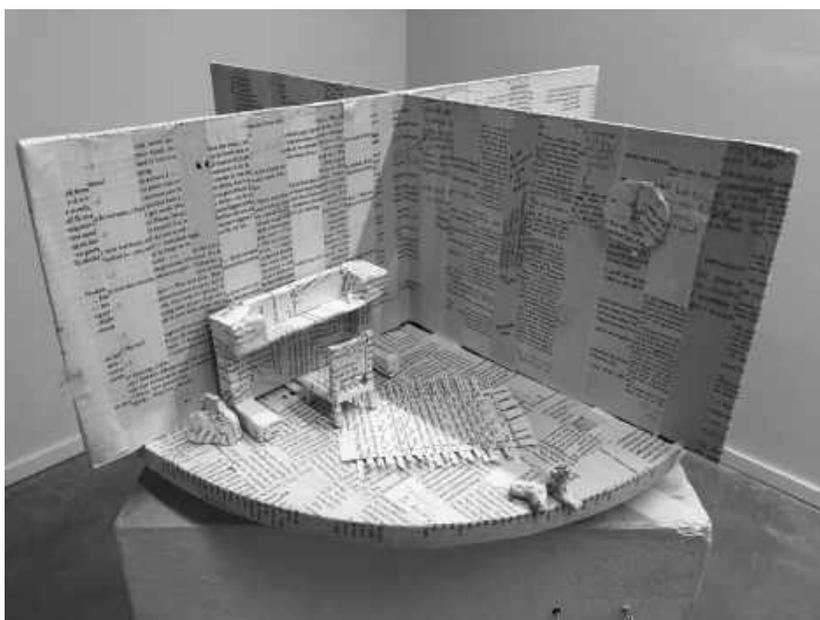
Every two weeks we came together at each other's houses to discuss the previous period of reading and writing. We decided to make these moments intimate and personal. They involved drinking coffee together, sharing a meal and exploring each other's houses. During these conversations we rarely talked about the content of the texts we read, but we talked about the ways in which we annotated and how these mirror our individuality. Therefore the conversation was primarily about our own individual experiences, rather than a discussion purely about the content of a book.

The intention of the 'network' that we present is to show these conversations and the spaces we held them in. For us, the 'Notes project' is itself an experiment about privacy and intimacy. Just as we did in our reading process, travelling the individual reading into collective reading, our work illustrates the transformation from private to public. Nevertheless, to preserve our privacy we had decided to make unclear which space - covered in annotations - belongs to which reader - edited and discussed - conversational.

© Aike Naisdamburg, Suel Canon, Rana Varmannem,
Margot Jansen en Miu Van Aken

The books we read were: *Portrait of Dorian Gray* (Oscar Wilde), *Proprietors* (Frank Spain),
Algebra in America (Tina Turner), *Spring Possibilities* (Chris Ware). The authors don't share any
views.

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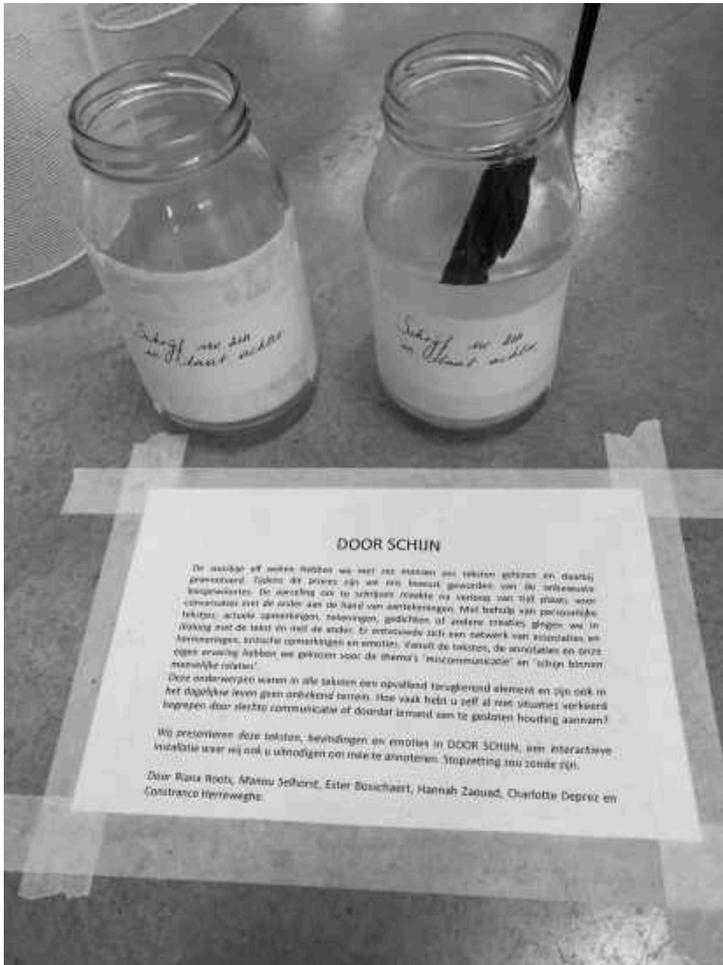
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"I want this as a Christmas gift!"
(Ivana Müller, 20 December 2019)

DOOR SCHIJN

Hannah Zaouad, Constance Herreweghe, Riana Roets,
Charlotte Deprez, Manou Selhorst, Ester Bosschaert

Anton Tsjechov - Oom Wanja
Dimitri Verhulst - De laatkomer
Shakespeare - Hamlet
Judith Herzberg - Leedvermaak
Dalia Taha - Fireworks



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"Ik heb de boeken veel intenser gelezen dan ik normaal zou doen. Ik heb leren lezen door dit project."

"We lazen elkaar doorheen de boeken."

"Op het einde voelde ik mij eenzaam omdat ik wist dat er niemand meer zou reageren op mijn annotatie."

"In deze interactieve performance nodigen we de bezoekers uit om de annotatie verder te zetten. Ze kunnen zinnen op de papiertjes in de bokalen schrijven, ze kunnen verder annoteren op onze annotaties op de bladzijden die opgehangen zijn in het muggennet, ze worden ook uitgenodigd om zinnen op onze lichamen te schrijven."

"Alles is transparant. DOOR SCHIJN. Maar dat kan natuurlijk ook slechts schijn zijn..."



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"I like the way you think of the book as a body"
(Ivana Müller)



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POLITICS - NOTES - WERELDWIJD NETWERK VAN WOORDEN

Karlijn Clocheret, Jade De Baere, Jasmien Lagae, Alice De Waele

Jeroen Brouwers - Bezonken Rood

Nathaniel Hawthorne - The Scarlet Letter

Bart Moeyaert - het is de liefde die we niet begrijpen

Dalia Taha - Fireworks

Samuel Beckett - Wachten op Godot

"Hungry man, reach for the book. It is a weapon"

(Bertolt Brecht)

"We created an installation and worked around the notion of being different. We were clearly very different voices during the Notes-project, so we used different colours of rope to show those voices. We also worked with the Barbie dolls from our own childhood to show how different things are than they appear. These dolls are clearly not living the best lives right now. They are stuck or something. One Barbie doll is even nearly strangled by a rope. We felt stuck as well, because we felt the pressure to be something or someone that we were not. In the annotating project, you are sharing your intimate thoughts with people, and you are confronted not only with yourself, but also with what others and with what society expects you to think of things."

"It looks like a spider web."

"Exactly. We felt stuck in the project because we tried so hard to please the crowd. During the annotating process, you tell rather intimate things, but you don't write down exactly how you are, because you feel a little censored, because you're still talking to other people. We tried to be as honest as possible. It was a very strange experience to read someone's very personal annotations, while you don't know that person very well. And you realize that your very private words will be read by the other annotators as well. This can be rather destructive.

“This is exactly the threshold between
the private practice of reading a book
and the relatively public practice of annotating.
This proposition makes the book a kind of stage.”

We invite the public to rip the books and hang the
pages on the rope. In our Western culture, we have to
respect books. Books are sacred! We reach out to the
others to accept that we are different than we appear
to be.”

“There is definitely some kind of voodoo practice at
stake here!”

(laughter)



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"Annoteren is een hecht proces, al heb je dat tijdens het proces niet echt door. Je leert er voor een deel jezelf in kennen. Je ziet ook hoe andere mensen denken. Het is een bijzondere vorm van kennisverwerving".

DE LEESERVARING UITGEDAAGD

Anthony Van Caneghem, Anthony Brynaert, Nora Flament,
Charlotte Dewilde, Juliette Hoornaert

Albert Camus - De vreemdeling

Dalia Taha - Fireworks

Tom Lanoye - Atropa: de wraak van de vrede

Henrik Ibsen - Spoken

"I love the smell of book ink in the morning"

(Umberto Eco)

"Boeken leggen een verband met ons verleden."

"Wij willen met onze kleine tentoonstelling een intieme ruimte creëren. Deze intieme ruimte is ook een ruimte waar wij graag zouden lezen. In dit kleine hoekje wordt de leeservaring uitgedaagd. Verschillende zintuigen worden geprikkeld. Want in onze ervaring is lezen een heel intieme activiteit. Het ruiken van boeken, smaken, luisteren van de muziek. De plaatsen waar we lezen, en natuurlijk ook: elkaar lezen. Wij geven daarom de bezoekers de kans om mee te annoteren en laten daarna elk een boek op een plaats achter. Het boek schrijft zijn eigen verhaal."

"We hebben zelfs een Spotify-lijst met de liedjes die we associëren met het lezen van de boeken. De bezoeker kan die desgewenst beluisteren."



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SLOWING DOWN - VERTRAAGD COMMUNICEREN

Nikolaas Boucquey, Siebren Nachtergaele, Elizabeth
Tack en Leda Decleyre

Heiner Müller - Hamletmachine
Hugo Claus - Werken en Leven van Leopold II
Dalia Taha - Fireworks
Samuel Beckett - Wachten op Godot



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Conversation between Ivana Müller and the students:

"Annotating is a way of slowing down, of having the time for reflection. We wanted to intensify this process by also communicating to one another by writing letters. In these letters, we comment on our annotating process. "

"Beautiful! Do you all live in Ghent?"

"No, one person lives about 30 kilometres from here."

"I ask this because I don't see a stamp on the first letter.

Did you give the letters hand by hand,
or did you send the letters by snail mail?"

"Sometimes we sent them by post.
Sometimes, when there wasn't any time left,
we put them in the book.
But, there was always a certain degree of slowing
down,
also in the writing of the letter"

"It was a very pleasant thing to do.
Getting a letter is very special;
And it really slows down things."

"It is interesting how these letters serve
as a backstage of the annotating process.
They are very interesting documents
about how things are done.
Do you share this with the visitors?"

"No, the letters are wrapped with a little cord.
It looks like a present, but, in fact,
it prevents the visitor from reading them."

"Wij zien annoteren als een vertraagde manier van communiceren. Een vertraagd cirkelen waarbij je langer over dingen kan nadenken. Vanuit die gedachte besloten we om gedurende het Notes-project met elkaar te communiceren via brieven. Dit was een opmerkelijke ervaring. Het was niet altijd even praktisch, zeker omdat we gewoon zijn aan de instant bevrediging die de sociale media genereert. Brieven schrijven was een

zeer tijdrovende en tactiele activiteit. E-mail is zakelijker.

Bij de tentoonstelling hebben we de idee van de brieven verlaten, maar ze zijn wel aanwezig als gebundeld pakketje. Ze zijn dan ook niet leesbaar voor het publiek. De brieven blijven onze intieme communicatie.

"We willen we in de tentoonstelling wel heel transparent communiceren hoe onze dialoog met het boek een dialoog met de annotatoren werd. Het netwerk van annotaties op elkaars gedachten kreeg vorm in een improvisatie-performance tijdens de opbouw van de tentoonstelling. Het transparante van de ramen weerspiegelt hoe onze annotaties de woorden van het boek in de wereld brachten, bijvoorbeeld door de kritische reflecties bij het boek van Claus."



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SOCIAL

Nina Van Praet, Roosje Mestdagh, Astrid Bonte, Kato Wilms, Lore Duvivier

Shakespeare - Midsummersnightsdream

Bertolt Brecht - Baal

Tom Lanoye - Gaz: pleidooi van een gedoemde moeder

Anton Tsjechov - De kersentuin

Aristophanes - Lystistrata

"A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside of us."

(Franz Kafka)

"We were very much in love with the book as an object"

"We cut the books, unfortunately, but we created a new book with pieces of the old books in it."

"How did you choose what to put in the book?"

"This was a very hard decision to make. In the end, we did it rather randomly."

"The result is an accordion-book, made with a very old cover, the pages can be close to one another, they can be very much apart from one another. This reflects a notion of time and movement while reading a book. Time can fly when you're reading, But some books are very hard to read. They are difficult and demand time. In this way, there is also movement in the book."

"Did you try to read the new book?"

"No, not yet.
But with the new book, we did want to create a new
story;
the story of our relation with the old books.
In this way, we turned our story into a book.
We invite people to read it
and to annotate it
in green"

"In fact, the book also tells the story
of externals annotating the book during a little
experiment
at the Krook, the public library of Ghent.
We put a table at the entrance hall,
with a few pens,
and invited passers-by,
from ten to one,
to annotate one of the five books we chose.

"We always started with the phrase,
'Hey, can we steal some of your time?'
And although people were very hesitant
in the beginning, explaining that they had little
time,
they did spend more time with the book than they
expected to."

One guy sat there for more than an hour,
because he had never read
Tsjechov's *The Cherry Orchard* as a literary scholar
before.
He took the opportunity and annotated the whole book."

"During the *Notes*-project in Italy that I initiated
at the Contemporanea Festival in Prato,
the annotators decided that they wanted to continue.
They became a book club, with the specificity of
annotating.
Now, they are meeting every two or three months
and they read a new book.
They are annotating all the time."

"We considered that too.
That we should continue the project."

"What you are doing in the book is a kind of mind
mapping
of this community in becoming, with the book as a
frame
in which they could inscribe their thoughts and ideas.
It's an interesting social project."

"The books kind of brought us together."

"There is also a certain idea of recycling in your
project.
What happened with the crippled books?"

"They are not in the exhibition, but
they are kept together in a cover.
We are not going to throw them away..."

"I think you should find a place for them as well...
I think they should come out of the cover..."

"We found it very difficult to take the step
to actually write in the books and to actually
cut them apart. This experience is articulated in the
exhibition mode of the book. The new book is put on a
pedestal, like a fancy art object in a museum,
so the visitor might be hesitant to actually start
writing in it.
The book will actually also be closed when the visitor
enters this room.
But the green pen is there, right next to the book,
Together with a small invitation card,
inviting every-one to touch something presented as an
art object,
to open it,
to experience how it opens,
to take the step to annotate,
and to continue the conversation."



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VERTALINGEN / TRANSLATIONS

Elisa Palm, Helena Huvenne, Bavo Guilbert, Klara
Camerlinck, Quinten Pouliart

Dalia Taha - Fireworks

Milan Kundera - Lachwekkende liefde

Gabriel Garcia Marquez - De kolonel krijgt nooit post

Anton Tsjechov - De kersentuin

Hugo Claus' - Lysistrata

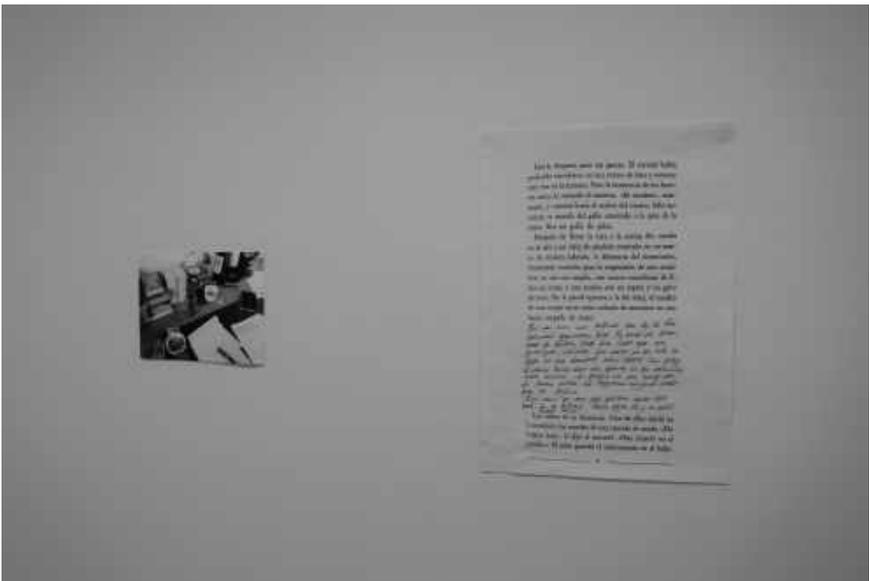
"Wij merkten gaandeweg dat we vijf vertalingen lazen. Onze annotaties staan ook in het licht daarvan. Wij willen daarbij geen waardeoordeel geven. Vragen als is het een goede of slechte vertaling stonden niet centraal. Het gaat ons vooral om de status van het repertoire binnen de context van de originele taal. In deze tentoonstellingen willen we de vertaler zichtbaar maken. Meestal is die functie weggemoffeld. Soms staat de naam van de vertaler op de cover, meestal helemaal niet."

"De talen waaruit onze boeken vertaald zijn, zijn ons vreemd, zoals het Spaans, Russisch, het Grieks, ... Het Spaans, bijvoorbeeld, klinkt exotisch en mysterieus. In het Spaans is de klankkleur anders, er zijn heel veel assonanties. In het origineel van Aristophanes is er dan weer het zangerige van de koren in het origineel."

"In de tentoonstelling duiken we naar de originele taal van Marquez. In de foto's trachten we de sfeer te verbeelden van de vertaler tijdens zijn werk; de sfeer die vasthangt aan de taal en verdwijnt."



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MISCOMMUNICATION

Simon Dhont, Camilla Arscone, Greta Zambonin, Leonie Rohlig

Sarah Kane - 9.95

Edward Albee - The Zoo Story

Shakespeare - Midsummernightsdream

Samuel Beckett - Waiting For Godot

Harold Pinter - Landscape

"Our main theme was miscommunication, because speaking in different languages is not so easy for us, Erasmus students, and we also found a lot of miscommunication parts in these books. The pages exhibited contain these samples of miscommunication. They reflect our miscommunications. For example, there is another Italian girl, like me, and when we could'nt find the word in English, we easily started talking in Italian. These Italian moments were a little frustrating for the other members of the reading community."

"Sometimes we also annotated in the book in Italian..."

"Did the other annotators also annotate in their
respective languages,
or did thy all annotate in English?"

"Some did write in Dutch, and in German..."

"Did I?" (rather surprised)

"Yes!"

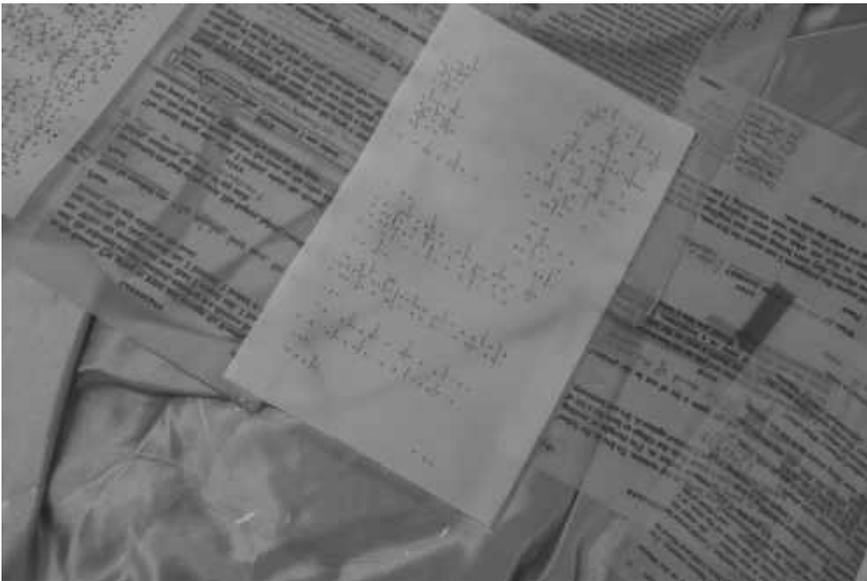
"Probably some small part as a joke or something."

(laughter)

"I think this is very interesting, as it creates a
little *enclave*,

a little linguistic show within the show.”

“But I also see that there is a kind of new script.
A new writing that you have invented..”



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"Those are indexes for the long short short syllable
or dactyl.
We put rice paper on top of the theatre text
and above each syllable
we put the index like I used to do in Latin class."

"I find it very beautiful, graphically.
It looks like some kind of
new language,
like a new way of writing.
And it almost looks like you have written from the
right to the left,
But no, you were writing from the left to the right,
no?"

"Yes, we were writing from the left to the right."

"You see what Latin does to people."

(laughter)

"Our exhibition mode was inspired by the idea that
books should only be on one shelf together,
if there is a connection between the books.
You cannot put books randomly next to each other.
Don Quichote should be put next to Anna Karenina, for
example.
So, we printed the pages on rice paper.
You can see through the pages
and the words are connecting in a way.
So, these pages can really be very close to one
another,
and maybe communicate through each other.
While in the play, the communication does not happen,
maybe the communication between the books does
happen."

“Once I invented a little game with books.
It’s a kind of social game you can play at parties.
I ask people to bring their ten favourite books of all
times
and then to actually create a library together.
You present one book and then,
on account of what you said about the book,
they suggest another book.
It’s very interesting to see how books relate, because
you create very interesting contexts through which you
read the book.”



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