

# IMAGINATIONS FOR A PLACE

An artistic  
research pilot

Andreas  
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Lukas Racky in "Tårnby. It's happening." by Lukas Racky and Onur Agbaba. Photo: N.N.y

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## PREFACE

**"Direct Action aims to achieve our goals through our own activity rather than through the actions of others. It is about people taking power for themselves. In this, it is distinguished from most other forms of political action such as voting, lobbying, attempting to exert political pressure through industrial action or through the media. All of these activities... concede our power to existing institutions which work to prevent us from acting ourselves to change the status quo."**

Rob Sparrow, "Anarchist Politics and Direct Action" cited in David Graeber "Direct Action: An Ethnography, 2009"

How is public space structured in the place I live, who has access to it, how is it used – and what role can artistic practices play in that context? What are the connections between the public space and the public sphere – who acts in it and how? And – maybe the most difficult question of all – what public imaginaries are in play? In 2017 I started to act on such questions.

At the beginning I started dialogues with random passers-by on the streets; we talked about public space, democratic participation, and cross-sectoral collaboration in the provincial suburb Tårnby, Denmark. The questions posed were at the centre of my artistic research project entitled IMAGINATIONS FOR A PLACE, institutionally housed by The Danish National School of Performing Arts in Denmark (DDSKS). You will find quotes about public space from people I met throughout the whole booklet.

Besides my engagement on a local level, I also built up a close dialogue with some national and international partners. Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski was one of them. She runs the organization Lokomotiva and the self-instituted cultural place Kino Kultura (2015–2021) in Skopje, North Macedonia. I first met her at the symposium "Art, Politics and the Institution" which I co-organized together with Jan-Philip Possmann in 2017 at Zeitraumexit, Mannheim. Tanurovska introduced me to theoretical and practical examples of the above-mentioned concepts of public place/sphere/imaginary which are closely connected to the post-Yugoslavian context where the reorganization (or should we say implosion) of public space in the 1990s has had and still has a serious impact on its societies.

Another important partner of this work is Morten Goll. He has been the director of Trampoline House, a "community space for refugees, asylum seekers and other citizens" (self-presentation by Trampoline House from their website). It was particularly positive to work with Trampoline House because of its deep entanglement in the arts, the social and the political sphere. Trampoline House started as a socially engaged artwork of artists and asylum seekers in collaboration. In order to achieve its goals, the project morphed into the fabric of society and assumed the identity of an NGO. However, the artistic DNA was preserved – in the working methods based on a notion of a radical culture of democracy; in the never-ceasing critical reflection on society as well as internal practices; in the focus on the experimental *modus operandi*; and in the careful political and social strategy to project itself as a symbolic identity into larger society as an artwork/alternative to the status quo. The director of Trampoline House expresses that 10 years of heading Trampoline House is his longest lasting artistic performance so far.

This booklet introduces the reader to the process I went through and which is still in motion. Through the process I learned by doing, being engaged with the local reality, with its citizens and through what I also understood the way Danish public institutions work. Tårnby is not the easiest place to start an institution that by its self-understanding interrogates and critically reflects on the question of what an institution even is and should be. Precarious work marks the engagement on this institution since there are insufficient means to support all that has to be done. However, we imagine the future of a new home as such, thus, we want to try, experiment and learn together... I started something that needs to be developed and settled. I am aware that this precariousness is shared with the friends I met in many places in Europe during this time. In Denmark the precariousness within a new experimental institution comes as part of an environment which doesn't leave much space for fragilities, experiments and open processes, since this context envisages and claims stability (or even overstability). While in a place like North Macedonia the precariousness, even self-exploitation is the rule. There is no support for new public spaces that would nurture experiments, open processes and critical reflection, due to lack of political will. Colleagues there are struggling to save the public spaces which are heavily privatized. In recent history they struggled against the aggressive attack that the former government launched against public space with the project "Skopje 2014". It was a project which aimed to ruin the modernistic past and build a new city in neo-classical architecture. It was an attempt to convert the public imaginary by rebuilding the public space. It cost huge sums and left huge debts. In these local-international dialogues, we can learn a lot from each other, knowing that "we compare circumstances that are not comparable" (B. Tanurovska).

Recognizing and also giving space to the differences between for example Skopje and Tårnby, but also between the conditions in performing arts and – as is the case of Trampoline House – fine arts and NGO work, I hope to offer a specific contribution to the study and practices of self-instituting.

You can find in this booklet a narrative of the related yet incomparable processes:

The artistic research pilot IMAGINATIONS FOR A PLACE introduces the initial questions and sets out the lines which inform the subsequent steps of the research. POST-REFLECTIONS present some conclusions and new questions that appeared at the end of the process. The PROTOCOL gives a deeper account of the preparatory travels to some European performing art institutions who have been a mirror to the work. It also presents the different public formats that emerged from it.

Andreas Liebmann

**"My body is my space.  
I don't need public space  
anymore."**

Christiania, inhabitant of Tårnby





Tårnby Citizens. "What is your public space in Tårnby?"  
Dialogue-based Street Performance by A. Liebmann, Photo: A. Liebmann

# GLOSSARY

- 01 ART, POLITICS AND THE INSTITUTIONS – A EUROPEAN SUMMIT:** a small encounter of various European artists and programmers that practise a close institutional interrelation between performing arts and local politics. It was organized for the first time at the festival *Wunder der Prärie* at *Zeitraumexit*, Mannheim. A following summit took place in 2019 at *Kino Kultura*, Skopje.
- 02 DIALOGUE-BASED STREET PERFORMANCES:** a performative practice of Andreas Liebmman. It consists of one (or more) person sitting in a public space. A sign with a request or a question on it is placed beside her. It is a silent invitation for passers-by to join and exchange.
- 03 DIRECT ACTION:** an action demonstrating how reality should be without waiting for politicians to make the adequate laws. (See Graeber 2009)
- 04 INFRASTRUCTURAL PERFORMANCE:** to question and shape institutions and norms of producing as artistic practice. (See Schmidt 2018/19).
- 05 INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE:** the act of critiquing an institution as artistic practice. The four waves started in the 1960s with the people on the board and the external funding of MoMA were questioned by artists.

- Today, the fourth wave of institutional critique can also be understood as infrastructural performance (Schmidt 2018) or instituent practice (See Raunig 2009, Tello 2021).
- 06 PERFORMANCE ART:** tradition within both performing arts and fine arts that dates back to the historical avant-garde, has, however, its heyday in the *FLUXUS* movement of the late 1950s onwards. The tradition implies different directions, but I mainly draw on the score-based practices from *Black Mountain College*, the encounters and discussions on democracy organized by and performed with Joseph Beuys as well as the site-specific community work by *Lone Twin*.
- 07 PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS:** a political model, executed as a performative act; a political action that behaves as if the ideal of a desired politics or institution already existed. (See “Direct Action”).
- 08 PUBLIC SPACE:** the physical not-privatized (urban) space that can be used by citizens for various purposes, amongst others, gatherings, political expression, artistic experimentation and other enjoyments of life. (See Tanurovski-Kjulavkovski, Bodrožić and Kachakova, 2018).

- 09 PUBLIC SPHERE:** the space of public discourse, especially the media – newspapers, TV, radio, internet platforms. (See Warner 2002 and Habermas 1991).
- 10 PUBLIC IMAGINARY:** the ghosts, fears, hopes, metaphors of public self-understanding, for example, the myths of nations, narratives about who we are or who we want to be. The notion is connected to the term “imagined communities” coined by anthropologist Benedict Anderson in 1983, used to describe how people across a geographical area together imagine themselves to be a nation.
- 11 TÅRNBY:** a municipality on the border of Copenhagen.
- 12 TÅRNBY TORV:** a 50-year-old building with supermarkets, shops, doctors, dentists, a specialist in mindfulness and a driving school close to Tårnby train station. It will be torn down within the next few years. It is gray and provides no illusions. Not even the illusion of a better life achieved through consumption.
- 13 TÅRNBY TORV FESTIVAL:** An artistic practice that took place in 2017 and 2018 at Tårnby Torv. It involved the creation of new performances, new relations with neighbours and collaborators, debates and other forms of social enjoyment.

- 14 SELF-INSTITUTING:** to establish artistic and also political institutions by artistic means and out of political need (See Raunig 2009). This can imply “Direct Action” and “Prefigurative Politics” (See Graeber 2009) for example, as was the case with Trampoline House who initiated an institution for asylum seekers to meet and get advice on their asylum process, learn the language, get legal help etc., when the state did not offer it. This is also an example of fourth wave “Institutional Critique”.
- 15 ARTIST-RUN SPACE:** a space for art initiated and run by artists. Examples: *Vierte Welt*, Berlin; *DanseAtelier*, Copenhagen; *Dansekooperativet* in Valby and *Magacin* in Belgrade.
- 16 SPORTS & POLITICS:** An artistic format which brings together citizens and politicians of different parties for common sports training, followed up by mutual dialogue on politics. It was first tried out at *Tårnby Torv Festival 2017*.

# TIMELINE

This timeline serves as a short overview of the work period, its outcomes and processes

2017

March

April

May

June

July

August

September

October

November

**RESEARCH TRIPS** to European self-instituted cultural places and artists in Belgrade, Barcelona, Athens, and Budapest.

**DIALOGUE  
-BASED STREET  
PERFORMANCES**  
in Tårnby

**FINDING THE SPACE** at Tårnby Torv

**FINANCING THE SPACE** at Tårnby Torv

**“ART, POLITICS AND THE INSTITUTION  
- A EUROPEAN SUMMIT”** at the Festival  
Wunder der Prärie at Zeitraumexit, Mannheim

**TÅRNBY - IT’S HAPPENING**  
Opening Performance by Lukas Racky  
and Onur Agbaba at Tårnby Torv

**TÅRNBY TORV  
FESTIVAL 2017**





Tårnby Citizens. "What is your public space in Tårnby?"  
Dialogue-based Street Performance by A. Liebmann, Photo: A. Liebmann

## IMAGINATIONS FOR A PLACE

### Theatre - for whom?

The idea that theatre is a crucial part of a democratic society, a kind of ancient forum where people encounter relevant issues, distraction, fun and social engagement can be an important motivation to do theatre. But have these times of relevance not passed away a long time ago?

Most people do not share the habit and interest in theatre at all. In a talk, a friend of mine quoted a Danish study that said that theatre in Denmark is visited mostly by people with a higher education and non-migrant background. The percentage of people going to the theatre is – measured by the “forum” idea – extremely or even ridiculously low. We theatre makers often claim we deal with important subjects but if these subjects don’t really have wide-spread interest, we should ask ourselves if we don’t live in an illusion of importance that has no justification in reality. How do we enforce the connection of theatre work with “real life” and its protagonists: the citizens around the corner?

I want to find tools, methods and thoughts towards a theatre that addresses “everyone” and that at the same time maintains a high artistic level. What could that be? And do I need to change my own notion of “artistic level”? What do I need to let go of? What is there to gain?

### Tårnby

My artistic research pilot “Imaginations for a Place” happened to take place in Tårnby: a quiet place on the border of Copenhagen near the airport. When it started in 2017, there was no obvious crisis going on (this changed with Covid 19). An environment of crisis (or what politicians like to regard as such) is always a good seller when it comes to funding applications for site-specific artistic work. But Tårnby does not deliver this narrative. It seems to be a place as ordinary as most of the places in Denmark. If “silence”, “sports”, “well-organized public sector” are the most exciting characteristics of this suburb, the excitement needs to be looked for in everyday occurrences below the obvious surface.

There is one important prerequisite for my research: Tårnby is the place where I live with my family. This is not a neglectable detail: the research should not only deal with the *idea* of “neighbourhood”. It should happen in *my* neighbourhood and concern not only some “daily conditions of people”, it should also concern *my* daily living conditions. My work needs to include me and the concrete context I live in. After many years where I identified as an *international artist* – involving touring, flying abroad, spending months far from the place I live – I started to develop an interest in the opposite.

I want to create an artistic practice coming from a preoccupation with my direct environment. In the context of the climate crisis and the disruptive impact that digitalization has on democracies, I find it increasingly important to stubbornly insist on artistic values created by the connection with a concrete environment and from there to reshape notions and practices of international exchange, openness and solidarity.

To approach my investigation, I first started with my personal artistic practice that I had already used for several years when I wanted to connect with “everyday life”. I call it “Dialogue-Based Street Performance”.

It consists of the simplest street performance I can imagine: I sit in the street, with two chairs and tea to offer. A sign on which a question or an invitation to talk is written (some examples so far: “Talk to me”, “Are you sick? Tell me about it”, “Lend me your property”). The situation is casual and at the same time slightly absurd – why talk, potentially for quite long time, to a stranger? With this method it is guaranteed that I open myself up to the people passing by randomly. I cannot preconceive who I might meet or who my target group could be. The method always provides surprising and sometimes pretty intimate meetings and sometimes even ends up in friendship.

The question I put on the sign in Tårnby was: “What is your public space in Tårnby?”. I asked for the *public* place where people felt they were part of a community, a political discourse, an entity bigger than their family and friends. I sat on the street and waited.

## "The saddest place on earth."

German Ambassador about Tårnby Torv



“What is your public space in Tårnby?” Dialogue-based Street Performance by A. Liebmann, Photo: O. Agbaba

## Europe

### Mannheim

A second thread of the work was to reach out to relevant people and institutions in Europe. Jan-Philip Possmann, leader of the experimental performing art space *Zeitraumexit* in Mannheim, invited me to co-curate the symposium “Art, Politics and the institution – a European summit” in September 2017.

This symposium was motivated by the need to reformulate the societal function of *Zeitraumexit* in the middle of a gentrifying urban area. How could this problematic be contextualized from a European perspective? We invited artists and representatives to the summit from cultural places and organizations whose activities deliberately depart from local necessities. They don’t have an official mandate, they have their own. They are “self-instituted” (Raunig, 2009). The solutions they find are specific – depending on the concrete situation in the city, the location and the people they engage with.

## Athens

From Athens we invited Elli Papakonstantinou. In the middle of the financial crisis in Greece she had initiated *Vyrsodepseio*, an important place for societal and artistic production, gatherings and experimentation in an old industrial building in the middle of the politically shaken inner city of Athens.

## Budapest

From Budapest we invited Sarah Günther from the performance group *Pneuma Szöv* and the independent cultural place *Aurora* that have to face increasing political pressure on arts and culture from the governing party with the effect of endangering or even shutting down important artistic venues.

## Belgrade

From Belgrade we invited Marijana Cvetkovic, part of a growing artistic and non-artistic community around the art space *Magacin*. They try to oppose the ruling cultural policies of representation with a strong network of solidarity, mutual support and the interweaving of political, social and artistic work. She also brought Biljana Tanurovska from *Lokomotiva*, Skopje who is part of their alternative dance education and production platform Nomad Dance Academy.

## Zagreb

From Zagreb we invited Tomislav Medak and Marcell Mars from *MaMa Zagreb*. *MaMa Zagreb* connects political, cultural, activist and artistic work in theory and practice. It has developed over the years a strong network of trust with an important political impact.

## Brussels

From Belgium we invited activist and theatre critic Wouter Hillart who has co-created since 2014 the wide network of political activism *Hard boven Hard*. It brings together NGOs, artists, unions and other Belgian inhabitants. It has organized several spectacular demonstrations and campaigns for politics of solidarity and diversity in Belgium. In addition, from the UK the sociologist Richard Stanton contributed with a lecture about the history of the role of art in cities and on the devastating effect of neoliberal policies in the city of London seen in the example of the Grenfell towers fire in June 2017. The Spanish activist Leonidas Martin reported on his experiences as an activist at various G8 summits and we were in contact with Semolinica Tomic from *Anticteatro* in Barcelona, a performing arts space that focuses its activities on the devastating social and cultural effects of neoliberal urban politics.

## Plural Perspectives

The combination of local and international encounter formed the core route of my work. How could I then find an adequate way to put them into a public format? If the public space is something that is created by the many people it contains, an artistic handling of this public space needs to be done with a similar multi-perspective approach. I needed to broaden my own notion of artistic work. I needed to be inviting. I needed to make space for other artistic practices. I needed to involve the experiences of other institutions. Citizens from Tårnby, colleagues from Denmark and from abroad, students from the Danish National School for Performing Arts (DDSKS), artistic institutions from Denmark and abroad should contribute to the “*Imaginations for a Place*” in Tårnby. That’s why I ended up doing a festival: the Tårnby Torv Festival at Tårnby Torv. In fact, it was an assemblage of different public formats, trying to maintain a process-based access within a set structure. Its aim was to give voice to very different points of view and life and meet them with curiosity and openness.





# TÅRNBY VOICES

BIRKE

I am 85 years old  
I am only a private person now  
When you get old, you concentrate on friends and family  
So no public space anymore  
In other times I was a pedagogue  
That was something else.

BRUNE

I have lived in the building back there for 10 years  
I had a woman  
She wanted sex three times a day  
Now she is dead  
Once I came home and my friend was there  
And there was a lot of blood on the floor  
Now he has another woman  
She lives in his garden house  
They want to create an organization for laughing  
And behind rådhusplasen, they want to have sex with others.

GISELA

I am a “real politician”  
The name of the party is Radikale Venstre  
Denmark is the only country with a party of this name  
But we are neither radical nor particularly left  
We have a mission:  
Education for children  
In Tårnby there are a lot of people  
Who fall out of the system  
And I fear for their future  
That is why I want to be elected.

MARC

I am kind of a macho type  
We love football, drinking beer, girls  
And this is what we talk about  
I once had a girlfriend that did theatre  
I liked it and thought it was pretty cool  
And that it could be something for me  
Because I am a good liar  
I work at 7-eleven  
So you think I am a public figure in Tårnby?  
I never thought about it  
For me it is a job  
I like the people  
All of them, the baker, the pizza man.

CARSTEN

We are renovating this space on top of Netto  
It will be a big party space  
We will rent it out  
We cannot have neighbours  
When having parties  
With 200 people.

YASSIN

I am a Muslim born in Tårnby  
I waited ten years until I got a flat  
I thought socialism was over  
I don't want to wait 28 years for a car  
You look like this guy who attacked my girlfriend  
My friends: Igor from Ukraine,  
Vincent from South Africa and one Dane  
I go to the mosque only every second month  
I used to have more time  
It is a strong community  
My public life happens in the fitness centre  
When we take breaks,  
We talk politics.





"What is your public space in Tårnby?"  
Dialogue-based Street Performance by A. Liebmann, Photo: A. Liebmann

## POST-REFLECTIONS

### The Production of a Social Moment

I am writing an application to get money to rent the space. I'm trying to set up a programme for the Tårnby Torv Festival. The idea is to show my research, to combine it with the atmosphere of a Volksfest with local people who are invited and who mirror international perspectives. I invite a children's performance. I invite other artists to participate. I think about associates to invite (sailors, a photography shop owner, a harmonica club, the NGO Vendligboerne). I invite two artists to develop a site-specific piece. I will involve students. I invite programmers from four European cities. My producer says: "You are in danger of working for other people and not following your research." I reply: "My research is about involving other people. I cannot do the research by only focusing on myself. To approach the local surrounding implies following the relations that happen and seem to be meaningful. This means extending myself into the context and letting the context extend me." She says: "Sometimes artistic researchers want to do research and end up creating a product." I reply: "My research is intertwined with different states of results. Without these states there would be nothing to share." The producer: "But why do you organize so much for others?" I reply: "It is about a space created by many people. It is about curiosity of what togetherness can bring. It is about a notion of art that produces a practice of sociality, going beyond the social. It is about creating an image of heterotopia. The strongest expression this artwork can get is reaching out beyond me and becoming the production of the social moment of the people involved."

### Economy of Trust

When working with unpaid labour forces (volunteers, non-professionals etc.) there is still an economy at work: what do you get for your contribution? What is the currency for the work? The question comes up as I invite quite a lot of local people to do unpaid labour: Hubert Franz, the teenagers, Yassin Idrissi and others. All these people would not expect money for their contribution – they have their work life and consider the Tårnby Torv Festival as fun, something that enriches their daily life.

If I gave them money, the “transaction” would be easy to understand: they do work and get money for it. Deal. As I only work with “human relations” as a kind of a currency, the human relation must replace the paycheck. Is this a fair deal, is it ethically okay? When does exploitation happen? Can I trust the currency of “human relations”?

Once during the work, after having taken part in the fitness training with Yassin Idrissi, I offer him an hour of Tai Chi training in return for his contribution. He obviously does not understand what I mean. But he is interested in Tai Chi anyway and we do the training. But it leaves an uneasy feeling because I replaced the meaningful “transaction” that consists of sharing interest and engagement with a separate deal. While discussing the issue with my artistic consultant, visual artist and director of Trampoline House, Morten Goll, we discuss that the work itself must be the reward. The deal between my collaborators and me depends on the assumption that Yassin, for example, sees his contribution to the festival as a reward in itself. His engagement produces the currency. If seen like this, economy with volunteers needs to be paid off during and by the work, not after. If I offer all the volunteers Tai Chi lessons, food, other “natural products” or even money, this means that the work itself is not worth enough.

The festival has to be the payment. Political debates, eating together, enjoying entertainment: these experiences are the “pull factors” (as Morten puts it). To be part of them, to have this sense of belonging, to create meaning by participating – these are the true reasons why people contribute.

All this is no argument for unpaid labour. But what I experienced is that some relations that happen in this kind of work *can-not* be paid for externally. Payment would not meet the quality of the experience. Is there a way of involving partners who work for free and still get what they strive for?

In order not to get into areas of guilt, shame or accusation, this economy needs to be openly discussed and agreed upon. When I ask someone to do volunteer work we have to name the economy behind it and discuss whether it works for everyone or not. There is always a currency involved. You cannot get away from it. What is your contribution, what do you get?

## Performing in Public Space

Sitting in the street: what is my role? How do I dress in public space? What signals do I emit? Who am I when I sit in front of a train station, only equipped with a sign and two chairs? I cannot *not* represent. In this case I choose to dress completely *as I am*, stressing the fact that I AM LIKE EVERYONE ELSE. I think this makes me and my performance accessible. But also a bit unreadable at first. I give no strong artificial signal that says “Hello! Art!” This unreadability is deliberate. I want people to get curious, to ask themselves, “What is this guy doing?” The irritation comes from the small shift from the norm: someone normal sitting in a normal way in a normal place – where you normally don’t sit.

In my artistic practice of dialogue-based street performances I have sometimes tried other outfits but I always felt “dressed up”. Once, for example, I was sitting in the street, same performative setup, with a sign saying “Are you ill? Tell me about it!” I was wearing a kind of emergency hi-vis jacket in orange. It already felt too theatrical and shifted the awareness from the performative irritation to my masquerade. The costume did not help me to be in a public space but prevented direct contact with my random acquaintances.

During the festival itself my *role* felt unclear though. I did not think about having a certain role. I saw myself as myself, having organized it all, but nothing additional.

By discussing this issue with my artistic consultant, I realize that at the festival I am not myself, I am not like everyone else: I PLAY A PUBLIC ROLE. And this public role demands a different framework to the street performance one. As someone who has created this festival as an *artistic practice*, this public role needs to be incorporated consciously. I need to find a language for this role – what about a kind of a suburban circus director who leads throughout the day, links the events, makes jokes, comes out with good lines, keeps repeating: “The next thing that happens will be different – and very interesting for you!”? The question is: what public figure needs to present the Tårnby Torv Festival?

Funny that I missed this point after having talked about the topic of public space for all this time.

## Notions of Art

Which notion of art could define the process of this artistic research? Doing this festival – what is the artwork? A joke that I had going on during the time of the organization was: “I don’t know if I only write emails or if I do artistic work.” Well, I very deliberately let go of an idea of artistic work that had been always present during my work life in the field of theatre. It says: “art happens (if you are lucky) during the artwork. The artwork is: a piece, a show, a play, etc.”

In the case of this artistic research though, I worked on a hybrid form that stressed not only the borders of what I normally would consider to be a festival but also the borders of my own understanding of artistic work. Being preoccupied for a long time with Joseph Beuys I have always been fascinated by his extended notion of art which meant considering the whole of society as an object to be sculptured by the many. Also, this sentence by Peter Brook has always stuck with me: “Theatre is only the starting point. In the end, it is about something else”. These and other examples have always encouraged me to extend my own idea of artwork and I have been experimenting for 16 years with various forms of performance, including ephemeral elements like talks in the streets etc. But until now I have always remained in the mould of authorship, even if it was sometimes in a collective. I feel that with the festival I started to enter another area. Working on a structure that creates interrelations, various expressions, including protagonists from the arts, the streets, politicians etc. – and still finding a form for it all. This is a challenge that will go on preoccupying me.

I looked for dialogue, I organized a structure, got funding, made a dramaturgy of the festival, invented one artistic format which was highly participative (somehow my “art-piece” of the festival: “Sports & Politics”), I engaged someone to give a lecture. I invited people to co-think with me about the function of a space, I invited other artists to develop a site-specific performance, I invited students into my space, I am now documenting the whole process in order to specify my artistic practice.

It is a practice that deals with the in-between space between people, formats and contents, that blurs the line of the defined art categories and their institutions. But I would not claim that I want to blur art and life as such – even if art and life sometimes completely overlap. When I take care of my daughters, I would not claim that I do artwork. I see a distinction. The art space could be seen as space where imagination and practices can influence each other, overlap, become bigger, become models for co-living. For this work, I really think writing an email connecting with people and public infrastructures can be an artistic step like doing voice exercises before performing the next monologue.



"Imaginations for a Place", Photo: Manon Siv Duquesnay





"Sports & Politics" by Andreas Liebmann, with local citizens and politicians.  
Photo: Manon Siv Duquesnay

# TÅRNBY VOICES

## TANJA AND HER FRIEND MIRIAM

My former work place was closed for the purpose of saving money  
It was an organization that connected libraries and schools  
For one year I thought, my life's work was for nothing  
I work for Soroptimist International  
A Lions Club for women  
Gender equality, women's rights  
I organized a lady walk - seven kilometres  
I also helped a Muslim woman  
But her husband stopped it  
We are part of K.I.T. (Kvinder in Tårnby – Women in Tårnby)  
My public sphere is the social sphere  
Make a better life through exchange  
Any need for art?  
Art is beautiful, of course  
But concrete help is concrete.

## SALEEM

Public space is about letting unexpected things happen  
If there is no public space, there is no future  
Only the hell of the private  
Your next acquaintance can become your best friend  
I wanted to be a professional football player  
But I injured my foot  
Now I want to be a social worker  
Healing social injuries  
First thing is respect  
There is a not a lot violence in Amager  
But in some spots - yes  
Some of my friends went the violence way  
I've chosen another path  
Thanks to my parents  
I will invite you to a football game.

## CHRISTIANA

I am from Brazil  
Was married to a Dane  
Now I have another Dane  
I was Christian  
Now I am a Buddhist  
I make clothes for disabled people  
I am disabled myself  
Do you want to get a coffee at my place?  
I will tell the children in my block about your festival  
My body is my space  
I don't need public space anymore.

## VERA

My husband died last October  
After 36 years of living together  
24 years of marriage  
36 years is half a life  
I had a lot of life before  
Now a lot more years to come  
I will smoke cigarettes until  
I am 105 years old  
I love the royal arena at Ørestad  
I love André Rieu  
But you get only pølser and burgers  
My husband's son calls me once a month, maybe  
My public life happens in the Bodega  
It is run by Thorben Fuglsang, Amager Landevej 92  
10-21 o'clock  
All day.

## MARIE

I don't know if I would you come to a cultural place  
to meet strangers in discussions  
and with music and entertainment  
My friends usually go, I do sometimes  
I talk politics with friends  
Usually I vote for social parties  
That want to enlarge the public sector  
No picture.





"50 farlige ting" by Live Art for Kids, Henrik Vestergaard. Photo: Manon Siv Duquesnay

## PROTOCOL 1 TÅRNBY TORV FESTIVAL 2017 - SELECTED EVENTS

### TÅRNBY – IT'S HAPPENING! Public contact 14.10.2017

As a boost for the festival, I invited performance artist Lukas Racky for a warm-up performance a month before the actual festival. The performance should start somewhere outside in the urban space so that random people can join. The performance started in front of the train station establishing a simple and effective choreographic game. This led to the participation of several passers-by who followed the performance into the space at Tårnby Torv 7. Lukas Racky and his partner Onur Agbaba dealt with stories from local shops and shopkeepers, and with the architecture. The performance ended with a choreography in the big space that referred to the choreographic game from the beginning. The title reveals that something (unusual) happens and uses the reference to the "happening", the idea of blurring art and life and melting planning with coincidence.

### PUBLIC SPACE ODYSSEY Related crisis 16.11.2017

The first public conversation at the festival had international guests: Dirk Cieslak (*Vierte Welt*, Berlin), Sarah Günther (*Pneuma Szöv*, Budapest), Jan-Philip Possmann (*Zeitraumexit*, Mannheim), Biljana Tanurovska (*Kinocultura*, Skopje) talked about the specific situations of their artistic work in the context of their city. The talk was opened with the question: "Tell us about the situation of the city where you work." The second question was: "Tell us how the context you described influences your artistic practice or the way you organize your institution at the moment." It showed that all of the participating institutions approach their work from a particular perspective towards the role of art in society and the situation of the society they are living in. All of them deal with a certain crisis: Berlin faces a crisis of the arts (too economized and market-oriented).

Skopje endures a crisis of urban space and democracy, damaged after 11 years of ruling nationalists. Budapest artists are attacked by the right-wing Orban regime and are without any public funding. Mannheim encounters a crisis of subsidies for experimental performing arts. Crisis looks different everywhere but speeds up artistic thinking – about what needs to be done! The mode of production, of communication, of creating a community around and in the art space comes into focus. How to justify art production today? Does art have an emancipative potential? Does life as an artist have an emancipative potential? Dirk Cieslak points out that the emancipative potential of art was the reason he started doing theatre. He sees himself as a part of the generation that invented a mode of theatre production which sets up “projects” – based on a topic. One of his milestones was a project that connected performances in four different cities around the world. So Dirk was part of the artists who globalized their perspective on art production and who tried to find artistic answers to globalization. His works toured around festivals in many countries. Now he thinks that this mode of work has come to a dead end: the global festival structures are set up. The independent scene might not be as independent

anymore – it relies on deadlines, juries, certain aesthetics that are repetitive. So – which is the way out? Dirk claims that *Vierte Welt* is working on a performative practice *after the project*. What does that look like? *Vierte Welt* started with a very content-based programme. They initiated an alliance with writer Navid Kermani who is preoccupied with questions of religions and the meeting of middle-eastern and western culture. They established collaborations with philosophers to write new plays and open their space for the development of new experimental performances. A longing for a new meaning of artistic production. After two hours of discussion we go to *Oxen Bodega* at Tårnby Torv.

### IMAGINATIONS FOR A PLACE An invitation to a long table with soup 17.11.2017

On the second day of the festival, I presented the work I had done in the streets of Tårnby, the people I had met, and the thoughts and context behind all of it. I invited Hubert Franz, a former teacher, philosopher and artist. Hubert was the last person I had met in the street and he instantly accepted the invitation. I asked him to give a

talk on the question of “what is a space”. The basic metaphor Hubert establishes is that the only private space is the bed. The first public space, he says, is the table. At the table you meet the first “other” people in your day. His speech touched on various topics like the difference between public areas in warm and cold countries. In Italy, for example, people sit in the streets after work. In colder countries like Denmark heated indoor spaces need to be established as public spaces. He also speaks about Kierkegaard who used to walk the streets of Copenhagen and involve people in his philosophical questions.

Another important statement was made by Morton Goll, director of Trampoline House in Copenhagen and artistic consultant of the festival. He pointed out the necessity to create spaces where strangers can meet with unconditional respect. In his place, Trampoline House, which was built to help refugees in Denmark, they try to practise radical democratic procedures. They make it possible that, for example, Syrians who support the Assad regime and Syrians who oppose it can find a way to speak to each other.

In my presentation I tried to sum up the questions that have been following me ever since the festival was set up, and the talks to citizens and foreign

guests. The core of the research are old ideas that have accompanied the function of theatre in former societies. My actual reformulation would sound like this: how do we create a space that is accessed by people of all backgrounds? how do we create a space where democratic debates and entertainment meet in a socially productive atmosphere?

### DREAMS FOR SALE The cliché of teenage revolution 18.11.2017

The third day, Saturday, started with an invitation to teenagers from Tårnby to an exchange on their notion of culture. They talk about their bands, writing and leisure situation. They especially talk about the freedom cultural activities provides - expressing themselves, not being under the control of adults, celebrating friendships, overcoming depression. But still, even in their cultural life in Tårnby they encounter a lot of restrictions – age limits, limits of resources etc. When they start comparing Tårnby with Copenhagen (mostly in favour of Copenhagen), an adult guest starts to argue for Tårnby. He refers to statistics and says that Tårnby is safer than Copenhagen and

that young people who move to Copenhagen statistically will move back later. The whole discussion takes a strange turn and they end up discussing which place is safer. This upsets Dirk Cieslak (guest from Berlin) and he asks about the anarchic potential of these young people and says that when he was young he needed to explore dangerous places and eccentric ways of behaviour. So, in this talk the older generation presents itself as surprised that the younger generation is not dealing with the same issues they dealt with when they were young.

## **50 FARLIGE TING** **Dangerous** **experimentations** **for kids** **18.11.2017**

As a midday-format we invited the children's performance *50 farlige ting* by Live Art for Kids. Two performers establish a laboratory for dangerous experiments that the children can be involved with or watch. Some of the experiments refer to performance art history. We have advertised the performance with a special poster that we hung up in kindergartens. Lots of families show up. The space is filled with fun and curiosity.

## **SPORTS AND POLITICS** **Balancing exercises** **with your opponent** **18.11.2017**

In "Sports & Politics" local politicians, an audience from Tårnby and Copenhagen, students and international guests trained together and then discussed the Danish tax system and the conditions of the right to vote in Denmark. It happens to be the core format of the whole festival. The idea for it emerged directly from the research practice. The format builds on three moments I came across in my research:

1. The idea of "Advocacy Day" of Nomad Dance Academy (see *Belgrade*) where politicians and dancers train together.

2. The dialogue with Tårnby citizen and social worker Yassin on the streets of Tårnby, where he told me that his public life happens in the fitness centre. With his friends he discusses politics during the breaks between workouts. So I asked him to invite me to a training. A few weeks later we met in the fitness centre and talked about Danish politics. I learned about the problems with the social democratic strategy of "Politics of Necessity", about the problems migrants and refugees face when they "integrate" into Danish society.

"Denmark is virtuous in establishing bureaucratic schemes on everything. It looks like the problems are under control. In fact, they are not."

3. The meeting with Yusuf in the streets of Tårnby. He is a marathon runner, second in Denmark in his age group (21 years old). I invite him to lead a training with politicians and an audience at Tårnby Torv 7 and to be part of a video shoot. The performance produces a simple but powerful image,

a moment of utopia – the direct meeting between politicians and citizens in physical contact, with humour and a real debate. At this event, local politicians and citizens do a little sports training session together and afterwards exchange views on political issues determined by citizens.

The whole festival with all contributors and contributions is documented on

[www.taarnbytorvfestival.dk](http://www.taarnbytorvfestival.dk)



## PROTOCOL 2 EUROPEAN SELF-INSTITUTED, ARTIST-DRIVEN SPACES - A SELECTION

ATHENS

**“The space is produced by the political situation. What happens in the space is produced by the dreams and needs of the people shaken by the political situation. If the political environment changes, the space must change.”**

Elli Papakonstantinou, Vyrsopeiseio, Athens

Elli Papakonstantinou did not intend to create a performance art space. The financial crisis and the confrontation between Greece and the EU in 2011 with all the financial and social disasters it caused created days and weeks of public uproar and demonstrations on the street. In the middle of this storm, Elli and her collaborators felt the need to find a building that

could contain a performance as another mode of expression. How could this crisis be met with open artistic minds and practices? They found this abandoned industrial building in the middle of the shaken city. The show they created there was sold out not only for the eight times it was expected to play for but for the next six months until the end of the year.



Following this, the space was used not only for further performances. Activists and NGOs organized meetings and discussions in *Virsodepseio*, playwrights held workshops, public discussions, trainings, and gatherings of all sorts happened through this immediate societal necessity. By the end of 2016 the space was closed.

It was a choice between creating financial stability for it through commercialization or staying in a precarious situation with the constant danger of the responsible individuals burning out. The situation had changed, and new strategies had to be found.

[www.elli.site/vyrsodepseio](http://www.elli.site/vyrsodepseio)

## BUDAPEST

**“Public space is under attack. Artistic freedom is under attack. The public space is the playground. Nobody can foresee the people’s reaction to free play.”**

Zsuzsa Beresz (Pneuma Szöv) Műszi and Aurora, Budapest

In Budapest the public sector is suffering from the financial and political restrictions of the Urban regime. There are no subsidies for artists. The government does everything to prevent alternative artistic spaces from existing at all. There is an aggressive “city development” going on that destroys neighbourhoods and tends to force

people to move out of the city centre. For artists and activists, to face an enemy so clearly can obviously free their mind. *Pneuma Szöv*, the artist collective I met in Budapest – connected to the two cultural spaces *MŰSZI* (which was closed at the end of 2017) and *AURORA*, still existing in 2021) developed formats to perform in the street.

A street TV and a public garden project created new spaces for citizens to meet and interact. A performance-art happening with a big squirrel as candidate for the district mayor that was announced as a demonstration provoked the local government. As a hangover from the fall of the Berlin wall it is easy to announce political demonstrations in Budapest. It is almost impossible for the state to forbid them. For an artist to get

permission to do a public performance it is much more difficult. Therefore, activities in the public space are advertised as political demonstrations. In this twilight zone between pressure and free thinking, artistic freedom can be experienced in a unique way. On the other hand, as most of these works are done for free, the danger of burn out is huge.

[www.pneumaszo.org](http://www.pneumaszo.org)

## BELGRADE

**“There is a need for civil society. Politicians don’t understand what dance is until you dance with them.”**

Marijana Cvetkovic, Nomad Dance Academy, Belgrade  
Skopje, Zagreb, Ljubljana

Marijana Cvetkovic is the leader of Station for Contemporary Dance and together with Biljana Tanurovska and others, is part of the NOMAD DANCE ACADEMY, which is an innovative model of dance education between several dance partners in cities of the former Yugoslavia like Skopje, Belgrade and others. In former Yugoslavia, public cultural spaces were very common.

This led to an easily accessible production and consumption of culture and produced a sense of belonging for the many people involved. With the new (neoliberal) regime these spaces became rare. Privatization is aggressive. A lot of resources are possessed by very few people. In this atmosphere it is not easy to convince politicians of the necessity for publicly funded culture which



does not represent any state interests or ideology. Nomad Dance Academy invented the ADVOCACY DAYS where politicians and important cultural figures are invited for two days of exchange on dance, public culture etc. All advocacy days start with a very easy physical training or game that involves the whole audience – including the politicians. This leads to another way of communicating with each other. The politicians experience what dance can do or be. The collaboration of Nomad Dance Academy is based on three principles: the principle of balance, the principle of open space and the principle of invitation.

*Invitation:* opposing the mode of selection. It enables open possibilities in collaboration. It is a method to avoid the authority of single people over others and opposes competition. *Balance:* being aware that you always open the structures and spaces for others – who is excluded? Who would like to join? *Open Space:* be open for surprises. Always leave some space for surprise (against the managerial principle to always have a detailed action plan and to later report on that – there must be space (and money) for things to emerge spontaneously.

[www.nomaddanceacademy.org](http://www.nomaddanceacademy.org)

## BARCELONA

**“ The space is surrounded by gentrification, the space needs to provide resistance. How? By insisting on the production of art. By connecting with the people who live there. By being inviting. By being stubborn.”**

Semolinika Tomic, Anticteatro, Barcelona

*Anticteatro* is a performing art space in the middle of the most touristic area of Barcelona. It wants to insist on the force and spirit of art and on its power to connect communities despite the spiral of total economization.

*Anticteatro* sees performing arts as the creator of a space that should include the weakest members of a society, and that can maintain a gleam of revolution.

[www.anticteatre.com](http://www.anticteatre.com)

## ZAGREB

**“The space is a hub for people of various interests. Sticking to this for many years creates a huge network of trust. We can do anything or nothing in our space. We go for what is needed. We are lazy if anyhow possible.”**

Tomislav Medak and Marcell Mars, MaMa Zagreb, Zagreb

“Net.culture club MaMa was established in 2000 with a goal to promote innovative cultural practices and broadly understood social activism. As a cultural centre, it promotes a wide range of new artistic and cultural practices related in the first place to the development of communication technologies,

as well as new tendencies in arts and theory: from new media art, film and music to philosophy and social theory, publishing and cultural policy issues. As a community centre, MaMa is Zagreb’s alternative “living room” and a venue free of charge for various initiatives and associations, whether they

are promoting minority identities (ecological, LGBTQ, ethnic, feminist and others) or critically questioning established social norms. As an open and non-commercial venue in the very centre of Zagreb, MaMa is a place where you can socialize and immediately experience cultural production that encourages diversity.” Through the openness of its self-understanding, by being stubborn, with the will to exist and to follow the necessities,

and by always challenging its role, *MamaZagreb* became part of a huge network of people that dare to rely on each other. Over the years, *MamaZagreb* started to get involved in city politics. The campaign that it joined won a referendum and the party it joined won 8% of the seats of the city parliament in 2017. So *MamaZagreb*, throughout the years, has become a serious political player.

[www.mi2.hr](http://www.mi2.hr)

#### MANNHEIM

“What is an art space good for? Can we also produce shoes in an art space? What does it mean if we don’t get enough money from the state to produce art. They don’t really want us, but they also don’t really don’t want us.”

Jan-Philip Possmann, Zeitraumexit, Mannheim

With its new leader, Jan-Philip Possmann, the performing art space *Zeitraumexit* in Mannheim started to question its role in the city. What is the importance of an art space in that context? The amount of public funding indicates that it is not important enough. Can new roles be found that it could play in its societal context. Could it become more relevant by changing its modes of production, of decision-making, of its understanding of artistic practices? These questions led to an experiment that lasted half a year in the season of 2017–2018: *Artfremde Einrichtung* (Species-alienated furnishing): a local parliament

of interested people decided what the space of *Zeitraumexit* was to be used for. The result was a completely changed “programme”: an alternative Christmas market was held in the black box of *Zeitraumexit*, a music school for locals and other activities. After the experiment, *Zeitraumexit* returned to a more traditional interpretation of performance-production, but some practices of relation and site-specific programming were maintained, and the examination of its own “place” within the urban context keeps it being an ongoing process.

[www.zeitraumexit.de](http://www.zeitraumexit.de)



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[www.nomaddanceacademy.org](http://www.nomaddanceacademy.org)

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