

Master presentations

10 – 11 July 2020

Igor Dobričić

Jimmy Grima

Maria Magdalena Kozłowska

DAS
theatre

WRITTEN BY
Silvia Bottioli

A couple of metres farther, a few moments later

It's late spring while I am writing these lines.

In the region I come from, it is the season of fireflies. They glimmer in early night hours, in fields and forests, and sometimes even in city parks.

From a human perspective, one of the most outstanding qualities of fireflies is their relation to visibility. They are pure appearances, manifesting in and from the darkness, lightening it with their soft and extremely fragile light. Darkness is necessary for us to be able to see them. In that same darkness they disappear, to then reappear again a bit farther.

This dance is their way of attracting female partners, an invitation for reproduction. Their appearance is not just seductive to their own species, but also for us human spectators. Indeed, we are enchanted by fireflies' precision and smallness, and fascinated by the mysterious forces that guide their movements in time and space.

As spectators of this beautiful and mysterious dance, there is only one thing that we know for sure. We have to keep watching

and cultivate our capacity to spectate.¹ We have to switch off the lights, let darkness take all the space. We have to wait and sustain the uncertainty (will they appear tonight? Is it too early? Too late? Will they come back this year too? Is the air too polluted for them?).

Once we see the first tiny light glimmering in the night, all we have to do is stay in suspense, keep our senses alert, and wait to see the next one, or maybe the same one lighting up again a couple of metres farther, a few moments later...

Multiple lessons can be learnt from the fireflies, and from us watching them. The most valuable, in the moment I am writing in, seems to be the value of invisibility and of waiting. Fireflies are loaded with the promise that if we don't give up, if we preserve the right conditions, if we keep watching, we will indeed see. We do not exactly know when or where, but the fireflies will come back, spring after spring, to lighten our dark nights and revive their promise of enchantment and seduction.

In her famous *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*², Peggy Phelan writes that

“performance becomes itself through disappearance”. Similar to the fireflies, performance can only be seen and caught by our senses in the moment it appears. Its volatile and ephemeral nature is so powerful in reason of its possibility – or rather its fate – to disappear. Same as the fireflies, the very possibility for performance to exist, is connected to the possibility to not be there, or not be visible.

The ontological negativity of performance, a vulnerability that is connected to the gaze of its spectators, and the promise that it always entails, are currently more crucial than ever. Theatre, as the broad field that also comprises performance, is about coming together. It is about staying in darkness. It is about trusting the invisible and waiting for something to appear.

Theatre is all about believing that our appointment will be met again. This is how the seven performative works were created by the graduating DAS Theatre participants: under the particular circumstances that forced their appointment to be postponed, doubted, dreamed about, cherished, and tended towards.

Each of these works propose a specific way for us to meet with art and with each other. Most of them renew the promise for an appointment that cannot be met now, but operates as a reminder to continue to watch and trust that the darkness will softly be enlightened again. There will we meet. A couple of metres farther, a few moments later...

¹ See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Survival of the Fireflies*, University of Minnesota Press 2018.

² Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Taylor & Francis 1993.

IGOR DOBRIČIĆ

The Time That Remains



Inside an interval between the now of my realization about the end and the now of the end itself, everything that ever happened is finally brought into the presence, is made available, offered to be actualized and reconciled. My body, whose demise is suddenly made immanent and known, is for a short while, transformed into the vessel of time. The memory of the ages past is now made to be my own memory, and when I speak, I am giving a voice to it. I read myself as a book, and what is written in this book is not only what I remember of my own existence but also the full recollection of what has ever existed. And yet the instant I open my mouth to read from it, it is only that much that I'll be able to utter before the end arrives to mute me away.

Igor Dobričić, studied dramaturgy at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, (former) Yugoslavia. He is working internationally as a dramaturg, collaborating regularly with a number of choreographers/makers (Nicole Beutler, Keren Levi, Guillaume Marie, Christina Ciupke, Alma Söderberg, Arkadi Zaides, Jenny Beyer, Meg Stuart, a/o). In a role of a teacher and a mentor he has a long-term engagement with the Amsterdam School for New Dance (SNDO). From 2010 onwards, he is also developing his own performative research project under the title TableTalks. During the last 10 years TableTalks is hosted and presented in Amsterdam, Berlin, Stockholm, Cairo, São Paulo and Vienna.

WRITTEN BY
Alma Söderberg

Igor

I met Igor in 2008, in Amsterdam, while studying at SNDO. Or rather, I discovered him on the occasion of him giving a talk about the Absent Body, somewhere in a dark space inside De Theater School. I still recall a feeling of being swept away, though I hardly remember the exact content of the presentation. I can see him standing there, dressed in black, in a black space talking about... absence. Something touched me then and there, in a way nothing had touched me before, in the context of my choreography studies – in Amsterdam, at a time infused by white spaces and distant concepts. Perhaps it resonated with my experience from studying flamenco. An art form where the edges are being explored; where breaks, cracks, sobs, mockery, absence and presence, death and life are being put into play, played around with. I instantly perceived something of that play in Igor, a particular conceptual affection, a lack of distance, or rather a distance that wasn't at the expense of intimacy, an immersive yet awaken quality, skilful but never detached. Igor could never "do cool", and I love him for that.

Igor is the only really tall person I know that insists on always looking up as he relates to the world. A trait that made him bump into Dalai Lama on the streets of New York; since Igor hadn't looked down, managing to bypass the bodyguards and fans that surrounded him. The stars, he said once, never forget the stars. There are as many movies as there are stars in the sky, he said another time as we drank whisky somewhere on the Swedish countryside. Growing up watching quality movies on Yugoslav TV and turning his surroundings, the streets of Belgrade, into a fantasy world; a movie set; a theatre.

He never had a problem making something more out of something less. He comes to the studio when we work together, he glances at what I do, he looks away, checks his phone (sometimes to my annoyance), reads something online and when the rehearsal is over he most of the times proposes a metaphor, an image, a thought in relation to which he organises his whole experience. Walter Benjamin, a thinker we both come back to regularly in our talks

(because we are equally drawn to the brand-new old) has said that imagination is “the capacity for interpolation into the smallest details”. Igor does this all the time: he introduces something other than the obvious after which he uses that as a theorem, creating a chain reaction of reasoning, a causal imaginative quest. He is a master of making beginnings, middles and ends, departing from the smallest detail. Sometimes it’s like magic, dramaturgical magic.

We often speak about our mothers.

PROJECT UPDATE

Seven Days in June

I will begin counting, but in reverse: Today is the first day of the last seven days. Almost immediately, a complaint: What an arrogance, such a proclamation, who do you think you are – a god? In response, I say: in a godless universe, those who believe in god’s prerogatives are the arrogant ones. I am just counting days. In reverse.

A memory: quite unexpectedly, at the age of 17, I was admitted to the study of dramaturgy at the Belgrade Academy of Dramatic Arts. At the beginning of my study, a small blue and red book was placed on the pale surface of a desk in front of me: Aristotle’s Poetics. From then on, this book will determine the criteria for any academically valid conversation about theatre in the context of the school. Yet the only passage of which I have a persistent recollection of is this:

“A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it.”

The time that remains is the (w)hole of my work. The beginning of it is marked by the moment in which I announce that in seven days, it will end. Everything that ever happened before the beginning, as marked by the moment of the announcement about the end, is carried through the middle between the beginning and the end.

Seven days ago, the book was opened. It is going to be closed soon. All is already said, while almost nothing is spoken.

TUTOR

Miguel Melgares

EXTERNAL ADVISOR

Keren Levi

ARTISTIC ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT

Roger Sala Reyner

JIMMY GRIMA

Kerogen Voices



Kerogen Voices is a music theatre piece about man-made earthquakes caused by oil, gas and other, more unconventional, methods of extraction.

Our research on this planetary phenomenon starts in Malta. It was liquefied gas, which comes there all the way from the Netherlands, that introduced us to man-made earthquakes.

The discovery of the gas bubble under Groningen in the Netherlands is the largest gas finding in Europe. It is also one of the most studied places for induced seismicity. In recent years the Gas Molecule, a sculpture commemorating the discovery, has been repeatedly vandalised with red paint. Campaigners claim that gas is a curse rather than a gift.

In *Kerogen Voices* the voices of science, of myth, of workers, of engineers, of Earth and of elves coexist and are in dialogue. These voices are suspended in an immersive soundscape of the elementary fluxes. Densely layered streams of text, live vocals, and enveloping sound invite the audience to listen to the movement and signals of the earth and to imagine its subterranean fossil guts as a giant sentient body – patient, but agitated.

Jimmy is an artist-curator. His trans-disciplinary practice is involved with the politics of memory and archiving. He is particularly interested in the disappearance of local knowledge and has an affinity for the relations between humans and nature. Between 2015-2017 he directed the *Windrose Project*, a multiple-site community-led research project harvesting local knowledge on winds. *Song of a Bird* (2018-ongoing) is a live archive documenting the collaboration with the microcosm of nature enthusiasts who can sing and call like migratory birds: the Maltese bird-trappers. Jimmy is the founder of the rubberbodies collective (2009). Jimmy is based in Amsterdam and is currently a resident at DAS Theatre.

www.rubberbodiescollective.com/kerogen.html

WRITTEN BY
Maria Rößler

With ‘island consciousness,’ looking at the world from the shoreline of Malta at the Southern margin of the EU, Jimmy Grima set out on a transnational artistic exploration of European identity in the year 2020, which draws connections between man-made earthquakes, continental European folklore, myths of entrepreneurial spirit and economic growth, and the geological consequences of human extractivism.

What happens to human identity in a world where ominous events such as earthquakes and floods are no longer natural hazards reserved exclusively for superhuman forces, but also calculated risks of capitalist production? What used to be read as an ‘act of God’ beyond human control, and possibly feared as an act of geo-planetary self-defense and anti-human revenge, is now humanly reproduced and integrated into a set of predictable side-effects of advanced engineering.

Kerogen Voices tells a multi-layered story about (hu)man’s obsession with the insides of the Earth and revives fairies and kabouteren in the role of accomplices to the human project of utilising the Earth’s energy resources. It invites us to imagine its “subterranean fossil guts as a giant sentient body, patient, but agitated.”

This vitalist image resonates with Reza Negarestani’s apocalyptic vision of an incapacitated Earth “charged with [...] a worm-infested body exhumed by worming processes and vermiculating machines.” In

Cyclonopedia (2008), Negarestani invents the geo-philosophical concept of “Tellurian Insurgency,” describing “Oil as the Tellurian Lube of all narrations traversing the Earth’s body.” In this speculative fiction, humanity obliviously participates in the fateful project of a mysterious dark energy working from below. Increasing the porosity of the planet’s surface through digging, drilling, pumping, and the building of more and more tunnels (pipelines), humanity industriously contributes to the burning of the Earth from the inside out, leading to its ultimate fusion with the Sun.

For *Kerogen Voices*, the theatre is used in the function of a public auditorium: a space set up and dedicated to listening with others. Human speakers gather around a table with installed microphones – like in a multi-national conference meeting or a radio podcast studio. They represent the talking; humans talking, then and now, about numbers, about the Earth. A familiar constellation, the “narcissistic reflex of human language and thought,” which also raises questions about the possibilities and the limitations of theatre in times of planetary crisis.

Jane Bennett, author of *Vibrant Matter* (2009), who propagates a new social sensibility towards non-human entities, suggests the cultivation of anthropomorphism as a valid strategy to counter human narcissism. Exercises of radical anthropomorphisation may produce a physical sense of empathy and help dismantle the perfect picture of a human-centred world.

In a psychedelic vision, the blue planet is evoked as a heavy floating body, pregnant with a turbulent future which is heralded by smelly farts and leaking dark fluids. Yet, we know that this compound body has the strength to survive ecological damages, epidemics, and the climate catastrophe – unlike the many species that it has generously been hosting on its itchy litho-skin, including the human animal.

Thus, what seems to matter here is: When and where does the re-fabulation of man-made Earth phenomena become necessary? For whom is this bloated Earth staged to

be perceived as a speaking vibrant insurgent creature? What difference does it make when we collectively imagine it not as a collection of inert geological matter but as a giant body with wounds and bruises, whose skin is violently poked and penetrated, squeezed and pushed without cease? How does this affect our human self-image, and more precisely, how does it re-position Western capitalist civilisation? With this, dear human reader, I invite you to complete the work with your own associations and considerations, and with receptive generosity.

BY
Jimmy Grima with Ira Melkonyan

THE KEROGEN VOICES
Cheyenne Stutzriem, Joey Frankland, Billy Mullaney, Jimmy Grima, Irene Sorozabal Moreno and Matar Pershitz

THE HUMAN-INDUCED-EARTHQUAKES* VOICES
Ira Brand, Juan Miranda, Noah Voelker, Isobel Dryburgh, Paride Piccinini, Erin Hill, Abhishek Thapar, Melih Gençboyacı, Ira Melkonyan, Sasha Melkonyan

LIBRETTO
Jimmy Grima

COMPOSERS
Jimmy Grima and Irene Sorozabal Moreno

LYRICS
Jimmy Grima and Ira Melkonyan

CHOIR LEADER & ARRANGEMENTS
Irene Sorozabal Moreno

SOUND DESIGN AND MASTERING
Mario Sammut

SOUND RECORDINGS
Justin Schembri, Jimmy Grima,
Tom De Ronde

RESEARCH DRAMATURG
Billy Mullaney

DRAMATURG
Maria Rößler

ADVISORS
Joachim Robbrecht and Florian Malzacher

TUTOR
Lara Staal

THANKS TO
Yolanda Van Gemert, Ruth Borg

*The list was compiled through
The Human-Induced Earthquake
Database (HiQuake)
(WWW.INDUCEDEARTHQUAKES.ORG).

PROJECT UPDATE

How do you stage an opera without a theatre and a mass audience cramped in the seats in times where 1.5 metre safe distance has become our everyday life?

Kerogen Voices was supposed to be the manifestation of my research into man-made earthquakes in Groningen and all over the world. Conceptually I found the theatre as the most adequate space to present the seismic research. The theatre as an auditorium was my first thought. Inviting the audience to the theatre to listen. The set design was all about enhancing the void of darkness which the black box can produce. All this was no longer possible some 75 days ago. That was when I was supposed to start rehearsing. Moreover, two of the talents are in a different country, one six hours behind. So, we had to come up with a new strategy.

With the talent either isolated at home or far away trapped in another country, we came up with the idea to record the *Original Soundtrack of Kerogen Voices – the Opera*, which has not been staged yet because of the measures imposed by authorities in order to combat the virus.

This soundtrack, we thought, should be burnt on an object (CD. LP). My response to the situation is to go offline rather than online. It was important for us that the original work – the staged work – is not replaced but anticipated. Then the form emerged through rehearsals and recording's and it was clear that we ended up with a radio play.

I also want to wish for all of us to collectively resist to produce differently in these times. To stick to our artistic values and practises. To stay hopeful and believe in what we do. To stay together as a community. To try and connect.

MARIA MAGDALENA KOZŁOWSKA

She dies for you



She dies for you is a journey into the woods where ‘the body is lost and the body is found.’ It proposes an audiovisual adventure among performances of pleasure, pain, confessions and testimonies. The mystery hidden in the forest promises an encounter with the true Self. The choice of a musical form is a result of Kozłowska’s interest in opera and jazz, where the singing body transmits sensations and affects, ambivalently offering its efforts and pains for entertainment. *She dies for you* deconstructs a figure of a diva, juxtaposing humour and pathos, acting and living, the popular and the holy, proposing sisterhood and laughter against the commodification of suffering.

Maria Magdalena Kozłowska was born in Zielona Góra, Poland. Her experience of theatre started at an early age. Ever since she was 13, she would write, direct and act as a member of the avant-garde theatre group Quo. She graduated from the College of Inter-area Individual Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Warsaw. While studying, she developed a practice as a performance and video artist, collaborating with contemporary art institutions – Center for Contemporary Art U-Jazdowski, Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, Raster Gallery, and Dawid Radziszewski Gallery. As a performer and singer, she appeared in theatre and dance pieces by Alex Baczyński-Jenkins and Marta Ziółek, among others.

Theatre’s apparatus never stopped being alluring to her, which brought her to DAS Theatre. During her studies she has cultivated her interest in the physicality and psychology of voice. She brings to life liminal personas, trapped in a feedback between theatricality and authenticity.

www.mariakozlowska.com

WRITTEN BY
Igor Dobričić

On the holy spirit and devilish reality of Maria and Magdalena

Who is that woman wandering through the forest at night? Is it Maria or is it Magdalena? This is not a small matter. Because if it is Maria, then the wind that sings high up among the darkened branches is nothing less than a speaking breath of a divine inspiration. If it is Magdalena then the invisible wind is just that – an inarticulate howling of the force “that blow wherever it pleases” (John 3:8). Between divine inspiration and a howling force she moves – Maria Magdalena. Hers is an operatic melodrama and an obscure narrative of undisclosed trauma. So how do those two relate to one another? The only way to speak about trauma is through the serious parody of an opera. The real is to be avoided, postponed in order to address it. But the other way around also applies. The only way to sing opera is by making a myth out of the blind obscurity of the real. The story that is being told is not accurate but the accuracy of what is being experienced is still “the real” substance of the story. The line of escape is taking one in to the heart of the drama. It brakes, it stops, it changes direction. But like in a medieval mystery

play it always keeps coming back to a basic fact: the deed is committed, and Maria Magdalena will reveal it by speaking around it rather than about it. Because, the only way to deal with a deed is to do away with a dealing. That’s the secret of re-presentation that belongs to a ritual of theatre. It presents what is not presentable and thus becomes a symbol of the real. The question that persists is: can we understand Maria Magdalena’s mystery opera as a way of dealing with a medium of her choice (theatre) beyond the work at hand? After all, opera means work, an oeuvre of a maker that transcends any immediate incarnation. My feeling is that Maria and Magdalena are wandering through the proverbial forest of her fractured and glorious imagination for much longer than what we can see. Yes, she is now entering the frame, walking into our gaze, but in my opinion she was already in a forest before the frame was established and she will keep wandering in it once the curtains close over the scene. It is of some importance to notice: there are two of them wandering. So it is not completely accurate to talk about HER in

the singular. As her name suggests she is never alone. Is that a relief or a curse? After all, it should be evident that it is of some comfort to have company in the dark forest at night. Yet the question persists: is that so? It seems that the answer depends whom we are asking for advice on the matter. For Maria, Magdalena is a problem. But for Magdalena, Maria is the dream to kill and revive at every turn. In their own words (it's not clear which of them is speaking): "That's why I need to build and then behead the doll again". I would add, that's also why Maria and Magdalena need not only one another but also the site, the event of a theatre so that the mystery of their passion can be ritually performed – again and again.

PROJECT UPDATE

The last few months were marked by the ubiquitous feeling of uncertainty. It felt painfully relevant to be working on a piece set in the woods – whenever an answer was found, two questions would grow right in its place. Soon enough my room was covered with a forest of doubts. How will it feel like to perform in front of people again? How do I deal with proximity, which feels to be at the core of the work? What about intimacy, so crucial in my relation with a spectator?

To deal with those issues while keeping the joy of the process, a radical shift needed to happen. And so I decided – *She dies for you* will premiere as a video work.

I like to think of it as "An operatic video". Or maybe it's "cinematic theatre"? I'm going for a form which would conjoin the two media, problematizing the most attractive procedures that each of them offers. For example – a close up. It creates a sense of directness and allows to follow the singer's emotions. On the other hand – it's so unnatural! We got used to it during our visual education, but when we think about it, it makes the viewer less than a witness and more like a doctor examining the body. When it comes to theatre – despite its conventionality, the stage creates an elusive universe, endlessly open for the spectator's desires.

What happens to the body on the edge of the cinematic and the theatrical? Can it disappear while staying in plain sight? Let's find the answers on the screen – an ultimate space for projections.

COLLABORATORS

Sofia Pedro, Beatrice Miniaci,
Delphine Bereski, Jessie Connell,
Jan Tomza-Osiecki, Joanna Rottberg,
Teresa Costa, Marcin Kamiński, Fuensanta
Méndez, Olga Micińska, Kamila Wójcik,
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