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**Archive of Queer Performative
Bodies in North Macedonia**

Curators:
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Ecstatic Bodies

Skopje Pride Weekend 2022

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The exhibition *Ecstatic Bodies: Archive of Queer Performative Bodies in North Macedonia* was developed as a desire, research and process that gravitated around four key words, four problematisations: the *archive*, the *performative*, *queer*, and (ecstatic) *bodies*. It was paradoxical, contradictory; one could even say an aporetic and impossible project. And precisely because of that, we had to make an even more urgent and necessary decision that came with great responsibility. Responsibility to look for, bring forward, present, and perform the world-making projects and bodily materialisations deemed impossible, unsayable, invisible, illegitimate, and non-existent within certain regimes of possibility of the archive.

The paradox, or the contradiction, comes from the ambition to create an archive of bodies, other, alien, ecstatic, queer bodies, bearing in mind the socio-political and violent histories of any archive. The archive as a container, an envelope that organises and structures the specific historical strata and embeds the specific power relations and the rules of the discursive formations, the conditions of possibility and intelligibility, the a priori structuring principle of appearance and visibility of bodies and subjects.¹ The archive signifies, what Foucault has called “the historical a priori,”² meaning the conditions of emergence, alignment, recognisability, visibility of bodies and objects, on the one hand, and the group of rules that characterise a discursive formation, on the other hand.³ Looking into an archive, doing an archive is to hide, occlude and impose the a priori conditions for the emergence of a community and the rules for the distribution of the sensible in this

community. The responsibility, therefrom, comes from the normativity related to the archival material and its validity as a source of truth or historical narrative, and its restrictions, limitations and exclusions that each archive carries within and which make the archive possible in the first place. This goes for the very criteria of “archivability,” which are always related to the general work of the state and the art institutions, the ruling ideological apparatus and interests,⁴ and the anxieties of the state in regard to the subjects it keeps records of,⁵ as much as for the process of archiving as performative work that chooses and shapes, privileges, excludes, and intervenes in keeping records and storing the allegedly undeniable evidence of historical truth. Within such frames, we have tried to enact and perform an intervention that strives to shatter the ways we know the past (political, artistic, cultural and social) and to open the archives to the unpredictable, the new, the coming details and voices that have been excluded and made inaudible/inarticulable, and that which has been made impossible.

The impossible refers both to the past and present while simultaneously opening lines of flight towards a futurity beyond our capacities. The past and present wherein the lives, movements, gestures, legibility, and artistic intelligibility of other, alien, ecstatic, non-normative, performative and queer bodies remain unrecognised or excluded, as violence that doubles in the present conditions and politics of the archive and art history, and their performative effects. But herein lies a paradox as well. Having in mind what we said about the archive, how to bring the archive together with what evades and traverses recognised categories,

1 Deleuze, Gilles. 1988. Foucault. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

2 Foucault, Michel. 1989. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London and New York: Routledge, p.143.

3 Ibid., p.144.

4 Mbembe, Achille. 2002. The Power of the Archive and Its Limits *In* Hamilton, C., Harris, V., Taylor, J., Pickover, M., Reici, G., Saleh, R. *Refiguring the Archive*. Cape Town: David Phillip.

5 Stoler, A.L. 2009. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

identities, and forms of lives, with queerness itself, and how to archive the body, being both the object of power and regulatory and discursive investments, and simultaneously an oblique matter, a matter that moves, is exposed and through its exposure gathers its ontological presence and gets formed as relational, leaky, unstable, and ecstatic ontology. Even more so, how can one archive the material, experiential and dynamic 'liveness' of bodies and their performances when what we have left in such archival conditions are only traces, ephemera, photos, memories, costumes, persistent feelings, videos or empty spaces inviting the imagination to project possibilities and imagine the no-more-present worlds as virtualities for the no-yet future?

In the specific Macedonian context of political, social and art history, and the respective institutional politics of the archive, the body itself is a queer scandal, the archive's other, its persistent paradox and tension, a living spectre for the art, national, and state institutions. A brief look backwards can illustrate this. After the globally and regionally turbulent '60s, in the '70s and after, certain transformations took place in the cultural sphere in Macedonia and provoked conservative reactions in the media, theatre and visual arts, especially the entrenched institutional modernism. We can name a few; one being the condemnation of the naked appearance of the actor Nenad Stojanovski in the performance "Sketches from the Legend of Cain and Abel" at the Ohrid Summer Festival, at the Church of St. Sofia, in 1971, while fertilising a handful of soil. After the theatre performance, on the Central TV News on Radio Television Skopje, Hilda Kondovska would warn the Macedonian audiences: "Without any intention to analyse one's urges for public nudity, which, of course, a medical problem in itself, or to analyse the legal aspect of it, we are left to wonder who was it that allowed such a barbaric gesture to be presented under the guise of culture, in Ohrid, no less, the

acropolis of Slavic culture, in the shadows of the first Slavic university?" A similar thing happened in 1973 during Milosh Kodzoman's first solo exhibition "Drug," which was interrupted and closed down by the morality and state police, who blacked the exhibition posters since both the title of the exhibition and the body of the artist were seen as publicly 'inappropriate.' At the time, Kodzoman was working together with Mirosljub Bežan, exploring 'bodies in transformation' as problematics ignored by the artistic and academic community, and was deemed immoral, alien, monstrous and shaming. There are other examples coming from the field of intersection between theatre, visual arts performance where those and similar 'bodies in performance' were deemed 'non-adequate' or 'alien', as departures away from the formatted fields, and were 'banned' or ridiculed from the official art sphere.

Many years later, such actions started to be 'read' as relevant art, performance-related 'text', materials and artworks which portray certain 'transformations', 'in-betweenness', 'becomings', 'explorations' and 'transgressions'. Reformations of the relationship to the body, its expression, its juxtaposition with the mind, or the Cartesian division of body and mind, came years later. However, one might say this remains an ongoing matter since the institutional modernism is still deeply rooted in the artworld's regimes of reading and presentation in the country, and bypasses the artistic and institutional expressions that are errantly parting ways with it. The body is more-or-less seen as the 'phobic object'⁶ of the artistic modernism marked by the demands and priority of the Cartesian subject who feels threatened from the possibility of being feminised, opposing all that is not-quite-not-right (read: *queer*) that the modernist subject represents.

This exhibition proposed a reading other than that supported by the institutional modernism through bringing an-other gaze on the body and body in movement, in performing or performative actions, and

6 Amelia Jones. 2000. *The Artist's Body*, ed. by Tracey Warr, Phaidon, 2000, p. 16-48.

strived to bring forward different social and historical readings and meanings of the body that oppose the modernistic alliance with the patriarchal structures, and with the “colonial, classical, heterosexual pretensions that it produces and maintains.”⁷ We presented the other body in performance, the bodies resisting the patriarchal structures of power as well as the history of art aligned with them, and proposed a reading, an archive of the resisting body in art, and in the cultural and political sphere. We looked at various performing, dancing and curatorial practices, i.e., performative aspects in the field of art and beyond, in North Macedonia. These practices stage what we call the “other body”, whose otherness was set in relation to institutionalised artistic frameworks, normative and hegemonic (bio) political apparatuses (Foucault) and the “distribution of the sensible” (Rancière), and, in particular, the sexual and gender regimes of body politics.⁸ This archive of contemporary queer/feminist performances in Macedonia covered the period from the last 4 decades, more precisely, from the ‘70s of the 20th century until today. It explored and incorporated a variety of art performance practices, which we approached as feminist performances and practices within the visual and performing arts, queer performances, everyday queer and club choreographies in the 1990s and today, the beginnings of gender studies and theory, political performance, the festival for queer arts, culture and theory, Skopje Pride Weekend, as well as other festivals and practices closely related to these mentioned fields that we included in our research.

However, the exhibition did not aim to present a history of the visual, performing and discursive

representations of sexual and gender minorities in Northern Macedonia, nor to frame the queer performative in terms of identity. That is why the queer performative and the queer performative body were placed in a broader context of performance practices that mobilise the dual agency embedded in performance, i.e., the gap between “doing” and “showing-doing”, between the self-conscious and self-reflective subject “I” and the embodied and social self. That is, between the identity absorption in the iterative play, performance and embodiment of norms and hegemonic material-discursive structures, and theatrical/dramatisation as showing, externalisation and re-articulation of bodily norms and negative affects, abject experiences and stigma.

Focusing on the performative practices that critically activate the contingency and instability of the performance of identities and bodily boundaries, in this exhibition, our interest was primarily on performances that we archived as queer because: a) they demystify social norms, normalcy, and the bourgeois morality of the Western masculine rational subject as historical effects of compulsory performances and exclusionary practices; b) they approach gender as a problem instead of an assumption and a metaphysical substance; c) they see in sexuality the possibility of antagonistic re-performance of biopolitical scenarios and redefinition of identity categories, and not a universal natural category on the basis of which social bodies and lives are hierarchised; or d) they approach the body as an open, dynamic, ecstatic and relational materiality, whose boundaries, surface and layers are subject to constant negotiation and rearticulation,

7 Ibid.

8 The exhibition is the result of a joint research and curatorial project of Slavcho Dimitrov and Biljana Tanurovska-Kulavkovski. This research for the exhibition is one part of the research we started some time ago in the frames of Nomad Dance Academy (group Archive, initiated by our friend and colleague Rok Vevar) to research the contemporary dance in our ex-Yugoslavia context from 60s to 90s. In that research our intention was to broaden the comprehension of contemporary choreographic practices in Macedonia today, and to start research on the ‘other bodies’, and reframe the position of performance, as one that includes, ‘piercing through’, diverse disciplines, social, cultural and political spheres, intersects the visual/dance/theatre art fields, and expends and transgresses the boundaries.

and not a closed transhistorical system and destiny. Finally, the exhibition was also interested in the performative queer body and the performative as e) political performance and collective public staging of bodies that resist, revolt, and show solidarity, while mobilising their vulnerability, defiantly and persistently appropriating and redefining their social abjection, and creating spaces, relations and communities of support, i.e., horizons and world-building projects of non-normative life-forms.

The traces of these bodies sometimes exist as ephemera, as flashes, as shadows, or as faded lines of movement, as poorly and amateurish documentary photographs, as glitched videos, as poorly printed posters, as letters - notes on singular, eventful and censored performances or friendships. Or they could be found as palpable, persistent affective atmospheres or embodied remembrance of sounds, touches, and sweaty bodies. Sometimes as (self) conscious and professional photo or video documentation of an artistic performance in its singular and transient performing, or as a collective cultural production of the queer community. Or as visual works of art preserved from museums, galleries or private art studios, which carry the history of creating performative effects in public spaces by opening the possibility of living, feeling and desiring differently, and of the pre-figuration of other worlds. But in all these forms or barely-forms of existence, the performative queer bodies, their traces and marks that are part of this archive, are gesturing towards an opening of the future (which as uncertainty, utopian desire and risk are at the heart of every performative, winking with the promise of success or the threat of failure), and thus they blow up the prisonhouse of the present and seduce us to ecstatic self-forgetfulness and longing for transformation.

If each archive demands and imposes classification, organisation, hierarchisation and chronological compartmentalisation of the archival material, our archive is also organised around several gravitational problems. But we are not archivists, nor historians. If anything, we are perverse archivists, charged with

erotic intensities affected by the different touches of the gathered materials, that we barely dare to touch, just in order to let them be, beyond any teleological imperatives of historical mourning that would be task-oriented and semantic and interpretative violence. Thus, it is not only us who were cut open by the archive's otherness and its happening, by the eventfulness of the material and the bodies, which make us question who we are and what else we can become. Rather, the material's organisation and classification are also open like boxes exposed to the promiscuous touch of the public-to-come and the encounters that would move the archive's bodies out of place, beyond any property, propriety or properness.

Performing the Other Body: Aliens, Women, Non-Human, Queer

We approached the works of **Milosh Kodzoman II** and **Miroljub Bežan**, **Nora Stojanovic** and **Viktorija Ilioska**, which were part of the exhibition as 'pre-texts' of queer body in performance and were seen as alienated or detached from the normative understanding of the performance in the fields of art at the time they were performed. But even more importantly, as enactments, experiments, and materialisations of alien bodies with respect to the political morphologies of the body, its limits, normative boundaries, and the possibilities for materialisations, experiences, and performances of the self in the respective socio-political contexts.

In the presented three photos from the performance **"Bodies"** (1974), which happened in the atelier of Milosh Kodzoman, he and Bežan create a mystified and ambiguous dream-like atmosphere, both anxiety-inducing, as well as seductive and invitingly eroticised, whereby both of them posed in unconventional and weird poses, looking either like mummies or some sexual "perverts" preparing for their experimental sexual play. Kodzoman wears black pants only, half-naked, with suspenders, leather gloves, a necklace and a metal strap on his hand. Bežan looks like an otherworldly magician wearing a black shirt and



Milosh Kodzoman and Miroljub Bežan,
"Bodies", 1974.



Milosh Kodzoman and Miroljub Bežan, "Bodies", 1974.

pants, and black leather gloves. The performers wear makeup and have rigid and unusual hairstyles, invigorating the impression of them as being creatures from another planet, intruders into the everyday habitual goings on of the present. A photograph of the performance **“Performance with Act” (1972) on Skopska Crna Gora** presents Kodzoman and Bežan seating in the foreground of the frame, dressed as strangers from a weird and unknown place, possibly from another planet, Kodzoman holding a book in his hand and judgmentally pointing his finger towards an imagined audience, while Bežan, sitting on an imagined throne, like a king of some indigenous tribe, wears a costume turned upside down with a big penis drawn on it and holds an umbrella in his hand. In front of them, there is a series of objects, lost and found everyday objects, which the artists, as if this was a bazaar, sell as their last available goods, now turned into artistic objects and works. In the background, a female model is sitting naked with only a folk scarf tied around her hand, with her eyes locked on the ground, looking both ashamed and disinterested. Embodying and performing as social outcasts, a position they identify with their status as artists and their art interests and practice, Kodzoman and Bežan act as messiahs, resiliently addressing their imagined audience.

All of the performances that Kodzoman and Bežan made during the six-year period (1969–1975) enact and bring into being an alien body, either immersed in the depths of the structures of the (at moments heavily eroticised) unconscious imagery or thrown into a cosmos as far away as possible from the earthly and suffocating life in an inert and suffocating environment. The body of the artist inscribed and marked with the insidious wounds of the conservative and hostile art system, and from the hegemonic imperatives and compulsory norms of the ideal bodily morphology of the new socialist man is dramatised and extroverted as a sign and reminder of defiance, as a sign made of flesh, mobilised by a utopian desire for being elsewhere and becoming something other, outside the confines and the prison house of

the present. They were aligned with the generation of Macedonian and Yugoslav artists of the “new art practices” that introduced conceptual art in the dominantly abstract and formal painting in the 1960s in Macedonia, and were amongst the first artists to experiment with body art, and made the first attempts for introducing happening and performance art in the Macedonian artscape in the 1970s.



Milosh Kodzoman and Mirosljub Bežan,
“Performance with Act” on Skopska Crna Gora, 1972.



Nora Stojanovic, "Gathering Scales of The Big Fish (Missing Parts...)". Video of the performance in GTC, 1997.

Nora Stojanovic's work "**Gathering Scales of The Big Fish (Missing Parts...)**" is a performance and multi-media installation from 1996-1997. In the frames of the exhibition, we included a video of the performance in Skopje (Gradski Trgovski Centar, 1996) and a video of the multi-media installation and performance in Providence (USA, 1997). This work was part of the project *Liquor Amnii/ Plodova Voda* (1996 in Skopje; 1997 Providence, Rhode Island), including five Macedonian and five US artists who collaborated in both countries. Suzana Milevska, theorist and curator, explains that this project presents "an intercultural interweaving of different approaches to feminine art writing." As part of it, Nora Stojanovic is presented with a threefold piece comprising *Flashback*, and *Gathering Scales of the Big Fish (missing parts)* – a multimedia installation and performance in Skopje and Providence. At the presented work "Gathering

Scales of The Big Fish (Missing Parts...) in Skopje she performs in a fish tank in a fishmonger's shop in the basement of the City Shopping Mall in 1996 when, stark-naked, she swam together with the fish up for sale, in the very shop window, before the eyes of all passers-by. This was the first nude self-portrayal of a Macedonian female artist, exhibited at such at a busy public place, full of so many passers-by. It was an 'alien' body, thus seen as a 'very brave performance' for that time, especially in a surrounding that was still finding it hard to connect art with feminist issues, even more, negating that certain art produced by women that depicted, included, or questioned feminist approaches, or disregarded any relations to the body as female body etc. From that perspective, Suzana Milevska would state in her text later in 1998 related to female art,⁹ that only Nora Stojanovic as the youngest artist from the group of Macedonian artists of this

9 Female Art through the looking glass at N Paradoxa, issue 7, july 1998, editor Kethy Deepwell, 38- 41



Nora Stojanovic, "Gathering Scales of The Big Fish (Missing Parts...)". Video of the performance in GTC, 1997.

exhibition dealt with the gender issue, while the rest of the Macedonian artists (all female) were working on a symbolic, mythological, artistic structures and concerns. She notes in the same text that Nora Stojanovic was influenced by her American colleagues and expanded the project and changed her discursive explanation to examine how the representation of women in the male and patriarchal societies was largely framed through the optics of 'flesh' or 'meat'. Milevska also notes that Macedonian female artists from that period were mostly indifferent to feminist issues, even going so far as to completely obliterate their sex in their artworks. Even more interestingly, the performance of Stojanovic did not only bring forward the female/feminine performative subject in the masculinist and patriarchal art and socio-political surrounding, but mobilised the position of the excluded and othered female body as possibility for experimenting with the habituated boundaries of the body and the range of experiences available for the human body, expanding the limits of her body

by exposing it to different elements and spaces, one marked by cold water and a suffocating space for any movement, such as the fish tank, and another cultural and geographic space in the US. Thus, this testing of the limits of the (female) body did not only bring forward a scandalously nude and exposed female body in the public space and art institutions, but opened the possibility for becoming-otherwise, as much as for questioning the status of the non-human and the commodified use and treatment of animals, fish in this specific case.



Nora Stojanovic, "Gathering Scales of The Big Fish (Missing Parts...)". Performance and multi-media installation, 1997-1998. Video of the performance in GTC, 1997. Installation view. Photo: Sonja Stavrova.



Nora Stojanovic, "Gathering Scales of The Big Fish (Missing Parts...)". Video of the performance in GTC, 1997.



Viktorija Ilioska, "Figure it Out !", 2018

Viktorija Ilioska's dance performance "Figure it Out!" was produced in Skopje in 2018, as a production between the artist and Lokomotiva, Skopje. The performance is a 'self-interview' of a body whose subjectivity is explored through a range of questions that are choreographing self-ironic postulates of the performing subjectivity. While rhetorically asking *Who are you and where do you belong?*, to the more unexpected *What is your superpower?*, Ilioska performs body without body, or body – as a hidden subject, one that is alienated from itself, from the context, from the public, from us. Using queerness as choreographic and performative methodology, this alienated body reveals itself through self-criticism, crossing references, and builds imaginaries about the self, which in turn is fluidly reformed from one body

to another, in a multitude of bodies and selves. Ilioska was working in and performed the premiere in Kino Kultura, a project space for contemporary performing arts, a space that also introduced 'other' possibilities for performance production, being a 'home' to multiple performatives of other bodies, where those bodies could feel - as belonging to- rather than as always being 'alienated'.

Queering the Heteronormative Public (Spaces and Institutions)

As Sara Ahmed rightly points out, *queer*, etymologically is a spatial term, signifying a twist, therefrom a twisted sexuality that doesn't follow a straight line, a sexuality that is bent and crooked. And very often, queer bodies experience disorientation in the world, while simultaneously introducing disorientation by their very presence amongst other bodies. This disorientation involves the "becoming oblique of the world, a becoming that is at once interior and exterior."¹⁰ With their twisted, bent and oblique relation with the world, their wayward desires and being out of line in relation to the normative spaces they inhabit and with the normative bodies inhabited by those very social spaces, their odd facing the world and being directed toward it, their discomfort in the presence of the gathered objects that gather normative histories, shaped by the contingency of coming into contact with bodies and objects that have extended and ecologically formed their bodies as disoriented bodies, Ahmed argues that the queer "sexual disorientation slides quickly into social disorientation, as disorientation in how things are arranged. The effects are indeed uncanny: what is familiar, what is passed over in the veil of its familiarity, becomes rather strange."¹¹

10 Ahmed, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, p.162.

11 Ibid.



Poster for Robert Mapplethorpe's solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje, 1987



Kocho Andonovski, “Letter to an Unknown Friend”, photo, print on plastic, dimensions variable, 2009.

From the exhibition at the main Post, Skopje, in the frames of FRIK Festival. Photo: Natasha Geleva.

Many of the works forming our archive were introducing precisely such disorienting performative effects that interrupted, problematised, and displaced the habituated materialisation of the public sphere, including public spaces and public institutions, while simultaneously exposing the heteronormative performative constitution of the public sphere and space. If public space and public institutions are sedimentations of iterated performances and embodied practices, beliefs and visions, that simultaneously frame and govern, thus reproducing themselves, the available range of movements, perceptions, desires, affects, bodily extensions and forms of communication, as much as they regulate the divisions of accepted, normal and illegitimate bodies, the queer performatives gathered in this exhibition break the cycles of reproduction. And they do it either through the performances of their bodies and the new materialisations of public space they bring into being, or through the performative effects of images, events, and words, as “doing things with images” that shatter

the presupposed necessity of the public sphere as it is, by shocking, disturbing, displacing, halting, frustrating, or opening habituated structures of being in common, of being public.

On different occasions, some of which we’ve attempted to register, mark and present within our exhibition, the presentation of queer art works had the performative effects of transforming and opening the unmarked heterosexual biases of art institutions by rupturing the silences of the “white box” with queer bodies, desires, affects and life-worlds, and at the same time problematising the ignorance of the official institutions. The exhibition of queer bodies in art institutions, on those very rare occasions, we argue, simultaneously performed the enaction of different worlds, or at least the possibility of another world where queer bodies are not the object of hate and silence, but instead could flourish, extend, socialise or make love. Even more significantly, the smuggling of queer bodies was made precisely through and in the



spaces that were emblems of modernist architecture and the modernist spirit. In this way, the things that these images were doing and their performative effects were done through reworking, recombining, reusing, and disidentifying with the modernist utopian ideals and emancipatory promises, albeit with a queer twist, as iterative opening of these structures towards their inhabiting and population with other bodies, desires, aesthetics and visions. A good example of this are two exhibitions we presented within our exhibition. Namely, the exhibition of **Robert Mapplethorpe** at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje, in 1987, co-produced by Obalna Gallery, Piran; Gallery Loža, Koper; Museum of Contemporary Arts, Belgrade; Museum XIV ZOI, Sarajevo; Museum of Contemporary Arts, Skopje; and Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, and the exhibition of **Kocho Andonovski**, the queer activist who also made the first public coming out in Macedonia, titled **“Letter to an Unknown Friend”** and set in the brutalist building of the main Post in Skopje, in the frames of FRIK Festival.



Velimir Zernovski, "ALL BEAUTY MUST DIE", 2013. Photo: Jasna Susha.

On the occasion of the Independence Day – 8th September, 2013, the public spaces in the City of Skopje were the venue for the art project **"All Beauty Must Die"** by the author **Velimir Zernovski**¹². Setting up Zernovski's drawings as billboards in the public space represented a project of art criticism targeting the foundational assumptions of nation-building and independence. The artist opened up spaces for all those who have been excluded and marginalised in the state celebrations of this holiday. He initiated a critique of the violence as a product of the nationalistic, masculinist and normative sociality. The critique of nationalism and its masculine logic simultaneously became a criticism of the "search for the roots" in the distant antiquity. Our experience is provincial. This is the grave and insufferable truth that Velimir Zernovski's project faced us with, a project in which masculinity, the dominant politics, and the provincial mind were intermingled. "All Beauty Must Die"

was not simply a reflection of the provincial experience and mind, but rather a project that opened a counter-provincial perspective, bordering with the scandalous, with the logic of the taboo. Including masculinity in the project had the goal to strip, problematise, ironise, as well as transform the century-old relation between politics and manhood. Zernovski's choice of naked male bodies in the drawings unfolded the body itself as the locus of the gender apparatus of power. The set billboards in public space, especially around the central city space surrounding the nationalistic project Skopje 2014, performatively enacted a halt to the normalised circulation of people and goods, scandalising and provoking the passers-by, "insulting their feelings" as conservative media claimed at the time, and initiated a string of public and conservative backlash across traditional and social media.

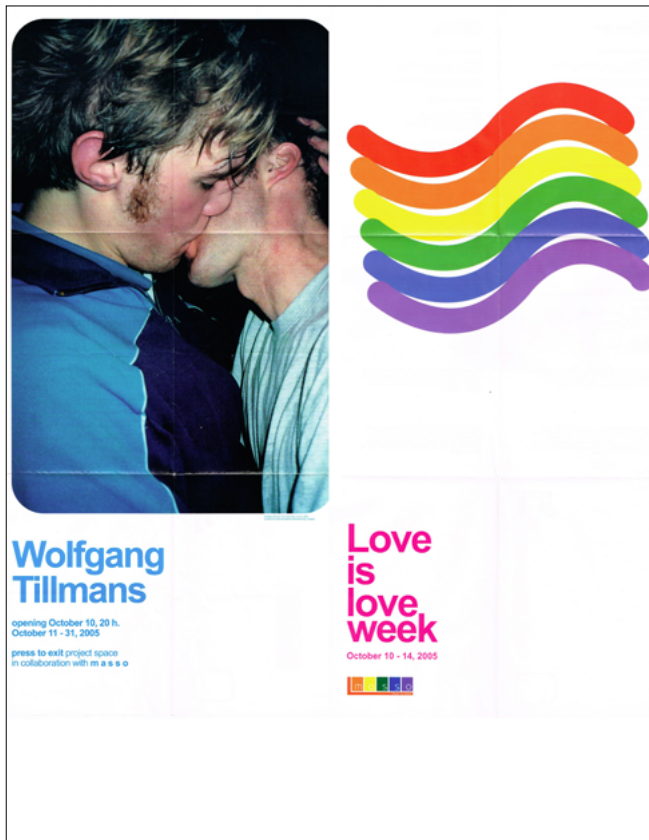
12 The project was produced by the Coalition "Sexual and Health Rights of Marginalized Communities", curated by Slavcho Dimitrov.



Velimir Zernovski, "ALL BEAUTY MUST DIE", 2013.



Velimir Zernovski, "ALL BEAUTY MUST DIE", 2013.
Installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje. Photo: Sonja Stavrova.



Poster for the Love is Love Week, 2005.
Wolfgang Tillmans, The Cock (kiss), 2002

Another event which marked difference and which queered the heteronormative public space/gaze in 2005 was the exhibition of **Wolfgang Tillmans** at the **press to exit project space**, a gallery space in the very central part of Skopje, on the Maxim Gorki Street, where numerous people walk through. The transparency of the gallery and the total visibility of the gallery space with its enormous glass walls/windows, faced the passersby with the huge photography **“The Cock”** by Wolfgang Tillmans, a photography of two young men kissing with total indifference to their surrounding and the (homophobic) world and gaze, enjoying their shared presence and exchange of pleasure and love. Press to exit project space with the gallery on the most frequent street at that time reformed the public space into a space to and for queerness. What gave an additional performative force of the photograph and its “shameless parading of gay pleasure” in the public space was its context, that of being part of the first-of- its- kind festival, Love is Love Week, organized by **MASSO (Macedonian Association for Free Sexual Orientation)**.



Wolfgang Tillmans, *The Cock (kiss)*, 2002



Sands Murray Wassink, Dressed conference, press to exit project space, Skopje, 2007.

In 2007, the gallery space of press to exit project space hosted the **“Naked Conference 1 and 1/2”**, by **Sands Murray Wassink**, a performance within the framework of **QUEER SQUARE SKOPJE**, a cultural festival that continued the tradition started with Love is Love Week in 2005. The project/performance revealed the deeply rooted homophobic and masculinist assumptions of the institutions, the public, and common sense. Namely, the project, curated by Suzana Milevska, was structured on several levels: *Dressed conference*, a discussion moderated by Suzana Milevska, with the participation of Suzana Milevska, Zarko Trajanovski (local expert on democracy, human rights and sexuality), Sands Murray Wassink and Slavcho Dimitrov; *Naked conference 1*, a short screening of the video from the original conference in Vienna with Elke Krystufek, followed by comments from the artist; and finally, *Naked conference 1 and a half*, a performance/discussion.

Although all these parts were to be held in the *press to exit project space*, due to the sharp remarks of the interim Swiss ambassador regarding the Naked Conference, that it was unsuitable having a male (homosexual?) naked body in a space that was located in the same building as the Swiss Embassy, and that was transparent to the outside passers-by, the last two parts were relocated to the official office space of the *press to exit project space*. In a letter sent to us 15 years after the original project, and on the occasion of this exhibition, Sands Murray Wassink wrote: “In Skopje, in 2007, we tried to extend half of something that had happened in 2005 in Vienna which was based on something that happened in Amsterdam in 2002. Even the plans for “The Naked Conference 1 1/2” caused a kind of scandal. I still believe the whole project could be seen as a relevant forerunner to explorations happening today with the body and intellect and art in all sorts of ways and I hope the full range of materials will someday become public again.”

Sands Murray Wassink, Naked conference 1 and a half. Photos: Kocho Andonovski.







Exhibition installation of Sands Murray Wassink, "Naked Conference 1 and 1/2". Included: Photo documentation from the conference in press to exit project space and the performance in the office of press to exit project space, copy of interview with the artist in the newspaper VEST, and text by Wassink published in his monograph White Flowers. Photo: Sonja Stavrova.

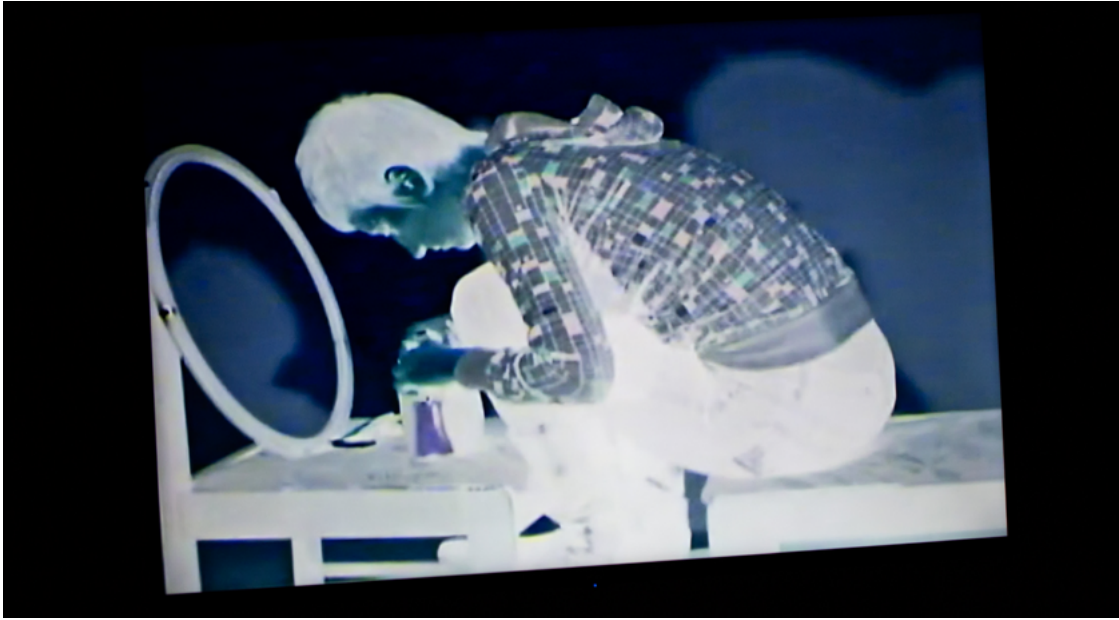




Vancho Dzambaski, photography. Protest in front of the Public Prosecutor's Office in Skopje 13 November, 2014.

The queer experience of being deemed as an excess, as too much, as invisible, or as disorienting disruption in/of the public comes with a price. The price of being subjected to violence and bearing the affective costs of being an alien, a stranger, an existence that some would rather prefer not be at all. The queer performative bodies thus also expose the affective costs and the violence traced through the surfaces and depths of the queer body. While the restrictions of the public sphere expel these bodies in the domain of the less-than-human, and thus fail to recognise the loss, the suffering and grievability of queer lives, the bodies of this archive bring to the public view the effects and mechanisms of its ignorance and violence, as much as they enact and manifest their collective persistence and resistance, precisely through the

mobilisation of their vulnerability and potential exposure to violence into resistance and collective protest.



Velimir Zernovski, "The Walk," video, duration 6 min. Production 2009, Skopje.

The video **'The Walk'** by **Velimir Zernovski** engages critically with the violence heteronormativity executes upon non-normative genders and sexual bodies as a means for the performative preservation of the limits of its exclusionary and coercive universe, and the allegedly universal, unmarked and disembodied subject of heteronormativity. 'The Walk' exposes the political vectors and embodied conditions of subjectivisation and violence. The video presents the struggle and agony of a dancing body in movement caught in the visibly not represented web of shaming and violence. The traces and indications of violence can be read on two levels. The first level, which serves as the anchoring point, and thus communicates the referent with the recipient, is the voice of the feminist and queer scholar Judith Butler narrating the story of an "eradicated possibility" of a gender non-normative

body "ever walking again."¹³ The second layer of indication of violence is inscribed in the very body of the performer in the video, a body that is hard to be easily recognised through the grids of the bi-party system of sexual and gender division. What the video stages is a sexually ambiguous body drawing movements in lines imperceptible through the optics of the hegemonic systems of (gender) significations, a body flooded by intensities and sensations, yearning for relational and transformative extensions. The body itself becomes the site of struggle of forces, of vectors of power and resistance, all of which are inscribed in the miniscule, but unbearably intense and hesitating micro-motions. Zernovski manages, ingeniously, to capture the micropolitics of bio-power whose operations target the body as its ultimate site of regulation, discipline and violence.

13 The interview with Judith Butler, a segment of which is included in the video of Zernovski, is available at YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q50nQUGil3s&t=9s>.



Velimir Zernovski, "The Walk," video, duration 6 min. Production 2009, Skopje.



Yane Calovski, "Anna. Noord.", 2010/14. Video and photo archive, installations dimensions variable.

Anna. Noord. is a documentary video and photo archive filmed by **Yane Calovski** in 2010 that follows the progression of the gentrification of Amsterdam Noord, known for its predominant immigrant and low-income population. During this time, Calovski met and became friends with his neighbor **Anna De Rauter**, a transgender individual undergoing her transformation process. Slowly, his focus started shifting to Anna and what she was going through.

Anna, a transgender person in a transition phase, in Yane Calovski's work *Anna. Noord* within the exhibition, evokes the affect of utopian hope, the hope of being otherwise or not being here and now. It is a hope for stepping out of the cave of the present, not being timely and exceeding the line of straight temporality indicating that the present we have and which has

us is the only possibility, the only future. The failure embodying her becoming, her rejection of the binary sex system, the uncertainty of life when faced with the violent processes of gentrification inscribed as traces of class failure on her gender ambivalent body, as well as the suffering, depression and pain effectuated in the blows of the social environment, become a possibility for creation, imagination and fantasising about different worlds, alternative lines, and defamiliarised modes of feeling. The persistence of her punk-rock performative and musical expression is the persistence of a "loser" in relation to the exhausting world of patriarchal capitalism and false morality. In the very title, Calovski's work captivates the constitutive antagonism and chiasm of the material environment and the sensual body in a very precise manner.



Yane Calovski, "Anna. Noord.", 2010/14. Video and photo archive, installations dimensions variable.

The antagonism does not lead towards consensual and reparative conciliation in a way that Anna would accept the compulsory pressure of the present and adapt to its demands. The antagonism is inscribed as a multitude of sensations, pressures and impressions on the affective and corporal life of Anna. The social and urban space becomes her last name. However, at the same time, her defiance, her resistance, the rejection of the social pressure is inscribed in Calovski's work and the urban reference Nord itself in a way that this seemingly ordinary place becomes inhabited with the spectres of a singular being and its broken fantasies, a blood stain, a scream, a trace testifying of the violent history of the urban location. The dawn of the future of Anna's life in Calovski's work remains murky, uncertain, unknown, without a resolution.

Worldmaking: Performing Queer Socialities and Spaces

This archive “folder” enfolds those performances, gestures, movements, enactments, and atmospheres of queer bodies that represent the force of performance as community- and world-building project, when queer performative bodies move together creating socialities and counterpublics. It is directed towards recognizing performance as cultural phenomenon that is embedded in drag shows and disclosures of certain acts and actions that we can find in the corners of the clubs, in exhibitions, or festivals that celebrate queerness and its various and multiple forms. We were motivated by a short statement by Ron Athey, given in an interview with Dominic Johnson, that forced our imagination to wander in wonder through memories, experiences, photographs, ephemera, video materials, sounds, and conversations that testify to the power of queer

bodies assembled in different marginal spaces and their struggle for building viable worlds, friendships, pleasures, and spaces in the midst of imposed worlds of pain, suffering, loss, shame, depression, and melancholia. “Imagine”, says Athey, “impending doom, in which the world is getting darker and darker, and your experience is compressed, and suddenly a mirror ball lights up and starts rotating, or a drag queen shimmies in a sequined dress. Dissociative sparkle is that split, where intense pressure makes something explode, in a glittering, oddly captivating manner.”¹⁴

One can say we followed Athey’s invitation to imagine its literal consequences and scenery. As part of the exhibition, we set up a dancing room, the entrance of which was covered with a silver glittery curtain. The dark dance room with black walls was also a sound installation, inviting one to reminiscence and dance

14 Athey, Ron. 2015. “Perverse Martyrologies: An Interview with Ron Athey” in Johnson, Dominic. *The Art of Living: An Oral History of Performance Art*. London: Pelgrave. p.212.



Clubbing Bodies, sound installation, part of the exhibition. Photo: Sonja Stavrova.

while being induced in a vertigo-like state of feeling through the spinning of a lighted mirror ball. Three DJ mixes were playing on loop, each of them presenting a music compilation that marked the clubbing, and in particular, the queer clubbing scene in Macedonia, from the '90s onward. One mix made by **Zoran Risteovski Bejbe** covered his fascination with the ball scene and his experience with everyday choreographies of voguing on the streets of Skopje and the clubs in the late '80s/early '90s, while simultaneously mixing different house music sounds and tracks, featured regularly on his DJ sets. Another mix by **Mirko Popov** marked the rise of the clubbing and electro scene in Macedonia in the '90s, related to the parties of Radio Channel 103, and choreographies of ecstatic bodies that broke open the normative bodily styles and enclosed selves on the disco podiums. The third mix was made by **Sonja Ismail**, as one of the most prominent DJs that marked the emergence of queer clubbing in Skopje in the 2010s, characterised by indie music and electro-pop sounds. The fourth mix was

produced by **Ivana Dragsic**, one can say a queer queen on the contemporary queer and clubbing scene in Skopje, meshing sounds from various black, queer, and female artists.

In this way, we wanted to pay tribute and reclaim the dignity of clubbing and queer clubbing spaces and events as liminal in-between spaces that open the possibility for expressing gender non-normative choreographies, an embodied resistance and a refusal to/of dominant cultural norms and space-time. The night time of clubbing interrupts the daily disciplinary heteronormative routines of time, i.e., the perpetual cycle of sleep, wake up, feed the kids, take them to school/work/study, cook, stay at home with the family, sleep and repeat again. As heterotopias, queer club parties provide a platform for disidentificatory performances of gender norms and sexual relations, as well as an atmospheres for the circulation of pleasure, desire, touch, communication, and self-loss, whereby the heteronormative bodily habitus is subjected to



Natasha Geleva, "I WAS THERE", series of photographs, 2021.

transformation, while queer people find a safe haven away from the pressures of everyday life and the policing gaze of public spaces. Even more importantly, the experimental transformation that characterises the queer clubbing spaces and the bodily choreographies within those spaces transcends the boundaries of those spaces, and the sensual and embodied knowledge instilled and shared in the clubbing spaces becomes an integral part of the dancing bodies in their everyday lives, either as memories worth fighting for or as experienced potentialities of freedom that reorient one's position towards the suffocating heteronormative world. The queer clubbing practices and performatives gain their full significance once we consider that the childhood years of many queer people, and their lives in general, are marked by the shaming hell and interpellation occasioned by one's queer kinaesthesia and embodied behaviour and the lack of or the failure to fully embody the gendered bodily codes by

queer effeminate boys, mannish girls or non-binary people. These failures are transformed into a defiant, dramatised extroversion enacted into a performance/event, transfigured into dance as a display of one's body publicly, and as a mobiliser of pleasure in looking at queer bodies. Thus, while publicly staging and enacting queer desires and identifications on the dance floor, they themselves can become elicitors of new desires, a desirability for queer bodies, pleasures, sensuality, affects, movements and worlds.

An important and crucial part in this context for our archive have been the **drag shows** that occupied the clubs' scenes and podiums, as performances that both expose the performative and embodied "nature" of gender and reconfigure and play with the "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify



Natasha Geleva, "I WAS THERE", series of photographs, 2021.

monolithically.”¹⁵ Thus, a crucial part of our exhibition were the included materials from various drag performances held in Skopje, starting from the first public and openly queer **drag performance by Laura Feer** on 31.03.2007 in Tocka, as part of Skopje Queer Square, and many other drag shows from the past decade, most of which have been lovingly and with great care and passion photo-documented by **Natasha Geleva**. As Natasha Geleva would say on the occasion of this exhibition in relation to her photographs: “These events have been a real revolution for me in the city. Finally, people who feel different can express themselves through costume and performance without fear of being judged or attacked by anyone. These were the first steps, and I was there to witness and document them. In twenty years, those photos will be history.”



Natasha Geleva, “I WAS THERE”, series of photographs, 2021.

15 Sedgwick, Kosofski Eve. 1994. *Tendencies*. London and New York: Routledge, p.7.



Installation view. *WORLD-BUILDING: Bodies, Friendships, Communities*, Family photo-album / photos from the festivals: Skopje Pride Weekend, First Born Girl, and FRIK Festival.

Festival productions that have served as platforms for the presentation, promotion and staging of minoritarian, feminist and queer performance and art practices were approached in our research as vistas for the production and enactment of alternative worldviews, affects, structures of feeling, and socialities. Presented through hundreds of photos compiled in a family photo album, countless performances, exhibitions, parties, social events and gatherings, intimate friendships, hugs and collective laughs from the **FRIK Festival**, **Firstborn Girl (Prvo pa zensko)** and **Skopje Pride Weekend** were staged in the exhibition as world-building performances. It is not only the performances that were part of these festivals that we see as occasions for the transposition and transformation of existing worlds, although they represent exactly that, beyond any doubt. The performances presented within these festivals, especially at the Skopje Pride Weekend festival for queer culture, arts and theory, transpose audiences to other possible worlds that break heteronormative

hegemonies, as much as they transform audiences and their affective dispositions and bodily habitus while pointing towards a future already present in the bits and pieces of the performances taking place on the stage. Even more so, these festivals have/had the performative force to bring forward and bring into existence different temporalities, spaces and social forms. They present vantage points for encounters, friendships, exchanges of ideas and pleasure, relaxation, questioning, and the materialisation of non-hegemonic and minoritarian infrastructures that not only make life bearable but something to be wanted and desired, a world where one's body can feel cushioned. Thus, the counterpublics brought into being through these festivals were simultaneously intimate infrastructures in the making, slicing open the division between the private and the public and making alternative relationships, companionships, kinships, intimacies, friendships, or socialities possible.



Installation view. *WORLD-BUILDING: Bodies, Friendships, Communities*,
Family photo-album / photos from the festivals: Skopje Pride Weekend, First Born Girl, and FRIK Festival.

The Body as Archive or Performing the Missing Voices and Ephemeras in History

One of the crucial preoccupations of queer people, theorists and artists has been the problem of addressing the archive, especially the archives of queer cultural practices, social forms, performances, experiences, feelings and lives that have been. First of all, because they have been erased twice; once in the past under the pressure of heteronormative coercion and violence, and a second time in the present historiographical and archival work that is structured under the state ideological nationalist regimes. And secondly, because they shatter the archival fetishisation of facts and evidence with their impropriety as surviving traces of queer lives, as ephemera that cannot be recognised within the frames of archival methodologies. As Foucault has argued, those queer lives are “lives which are as though they hadn’t existed, lives which only survive from the clash with a power whose only wish was to annihilate or at least to efface them, lives which only return to us through the effect of multiple chances,”¹⁶ and which, thereby, cannot find their place in the standard history book, nor satisfy our desires for wholeness and interrupted or reflected identity with the past.

The look backwards towards a queer past thus demands an experimental and sensual methodology that probes and touches fragments, pieces, traces, and non-institutional materials; one that cannot be subsumed under homogenising gender and sexual identity in general categories, precisely as a result of the historical distance and the different socio-political and discursive regimes that enveloped those lives. Yet, precisely because of the distance and the ongoing and shared material violence across time, the queer or feminist archivist is moved by the “queer historical impulse, an impulse toward making connections across time between, on the one hand, lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then and, on the other, those left out of current sexual categories now. Such an impulse extends the resources for self- and community building into even the distant past.”¹⁷ In the cross-temporal touches that queers and queer performances enact, the past can be memorised, iterated and reiterated in performative enactment, in such a way that historically normative cultural practices can be reconfigured and re-energised for different purposes and desires,

16 Foucault, Michel. 2003. “The Lives of Infamous Men”, in *The Essential Foucault*, eds. Rabinow, Paul and Rose, Nikolas. New York: The New Press.

17 Dinshaw, Carolyn. 1999. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, p.1.



Aleksandar Georgiev and Dario Barreto Damas, "MOONLIGHT", 2019.



while the subcultural practices, lives, and works can be preserved as collective heritage by being reembodyed, thus transmitted, brought forth or manifested. Both performative strategies, however, necessitate the force and work of the imagination in drawing lines across fragments, and temporarily filling the empty spaces left by the violence of history. "Such performances help shape a history that exceeds the traditional archival systems of the museum, the library, or the university. This history endures and is passed on through performances that archive the past even as they restage and reimagine it."¹⁸ Finally, the performative reenactment of past practices transposes the performer and the spectator in times which are not one's own, and which shatter the present prison house of identities and their naturalness.

In this part, or conceptually developed line, we are presenting **Aleksandar Georgiev and Dario Barreto Damas** with their performance **MOONLIGHT**, but also their collaborative project with **Zhana Pencheva** titled **STEAM ROOM**, and the artistic research and performative works by **Hristina Ivanovska**.

MOONLIGHT was produced by Lokomotiva in co-production with Garage Collective from Bulgaria and premiered in Kino Kultura, in Skopje in 2019 and is a choreographic project that focuses on the body in rhythm, in stational position, revealed, disrupted by interaction and other actions, or the body that affectively creates poetic structures and 'explores dispersed meanings, or a malleable reality' as the authors would say. It travels through senses that were structured through socially gender conditioned games, stories, and songs, which create a fixed identity. **MOONLIGHT** is an archive that is rediscovering and recognising new meanings of those socially determined identities, through their unfolding and queering the preconditioned, bodily archived normativity. "MOONLIGHT functions as a quick machinery of change and disruption. **MOONLIGHT** plays with Disney heritage,

dislocating its known dispositions and understandings," the artists add. The queer and perverse archiving of normative cultural and pop-cultural heritage through the dancing bodies, and its performative and embodied displacement in changing forms and relations, reflects the queer child's impulse to "attach [itself] intently to a few cultural objects, objects of high or popular culture or both, objects whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive, or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us, became a prime resource for survival. We needed for there to be sites where the meanings didn't line up tidily with each other, and we learned to invest those sites with fascination and love."¹⁹

"**dragON**", a choreographic trilogy co-authored by **Aleksandar Georgiev, Zhana Pencheva and Dario Barreto Damas**, a.k.a. **STEAM ROOM**, deals with the protest and celebration body in dragging scenes, exploring their relation within dance and choreography. It is structured in three choreographic pieces that deal with dance, sound and site, respectively: **dragON aka PONY / dragON aka Phoenix / dragON who spits fire**. **dragON aka PONY** is a choreographic work that works on creating a space of constant transition, unfolding intimacy and exposing humble co-existence through dance references from the past and present arriving from Western and Eastern Europe. It is created as a pop work which revives geometrical choreography through the prism of classicism and the usage of folklore as a ritualistic form. "dragON aka PONY has a little bit of Isadora and a lot of MTV or VH1," said the dancers. The second part of the trilogy, **DragOn aka Phoenix**, also deals with the protest and celebration of the body in the dragging scene, exploring the correlation between dance and choreography. Aleksandar and Dario's work has not been limited only to their dance projects. In the past couple of years, through a series of workshops, they have been working on 'drag choreographies' dedicated to the drag community in Skopje and everyone interested.

18 Román, David. 2005. *Performance in America*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, p.174.

19 Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, p.3.



STEAM ROOM, "dragON aka PHOENIX," 2021. Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje.
Photo: Natasha Geleva.



Hristina Ivanoska, Document Missing: Performance no. 8 (Letter), 2018, digital photography. Photo: Žarko Culic. Courtesy of the artist.

Hristina Ivanoska was represented with three works that are part of a series of live and video performances that Ivanoska is conceptualising, writing, and executing as part of her PhD artistic research titled “Document Missing: The intricate sense of truth in oral histories”: *Document Missing: Performance no. 8 (Letter)*, 2018, digital photography, diptych, *Document Missing: Performance no. 3 (Action Object)*, *Document Missing: Performance no. 5 (Three Actions)*, HD video. These works are part of the conceptual artistic research she began in 2014 and refer to the forms, narratives and aesthetics of the political action of women in Macedonia in the first half of the 20th century and their connection to the current forms of resistance, as ephemera in history. In these works, she is referring to the missing archives

related to the work of Rosa Plaveva and her daughter Nadezhda Plaveva Stanojevic, to whom she tries to give a voice through different media, performance and her bodily re-enactment in particular. Rosa Plaveva, a Macedonian woman freedom fighter and activist in the Ilinden Uprising (1903) and in diverse emancipatory events in North Macedonia, is one of the women in whom Ivanoska invested her conceptual artistic research. In *Document Missing: Performance no. 8 (Letter)*, 2018, for example, Ivanoska executes a fragment of Plaveva’s subversive actions to emphasise and re-examine the methods she used in her performative actions. According to Rosa Plaveva’s memories, in 1922, the Socialist party in Skopje received a letter from Russia written by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, asking them to act from the underground.



Hristina Ivanoska, Document Missing: Performance no. 5 (Three Actions), 2017, HD video, 05:45min,
Production team: Yane Calovski (video and photography), Gjorgje Jovanovik (editing). Courtesy of the artist.

The reason for this request was the Decree from December 30, 1920, known as “Revelation”, with which the Government of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians, where Vardar Macedonia was an integral part, banned the work of the Communist party in Yugoslavia and the pro-communist workers’ unions. At the same time, it suspended certain labour rights and constitutional rights. The delivery of the letter was revealed by the Government and a search was carried out in the house of Plavevi. They found the coded letter and arrested Rosa Plaveva. The paper with the decoding key was in the pocket of the coat she was wearing on the way to the police station. To prevent them from decoding the letter, she used the only moment she was left alone in one of the offices to quickly swallow the paper. Questioned, tortured, and

beaten up, she ended up in a hospital for 16 days and was then taken to prison for additional 35 days. The coded letter sent by Lenin remains a secret.

For the occasion of the exhibition, Ivanoska developed a new performance piece, „**Document Missing: Performance no. 6 (Daughter)**,” as an attempt to tell a story about power, speech and punishment, and about the injustice, insult and trauma that has been inflicted upon the female body by the state apparatus. The focus was on the life of Nadezhda Plaveva Stanojevic, Rosa Plaveva’s daughter, who was imprisoned by the UDBA (Yugoslav State Security Directorate) during the Inform Bureau (1948-1956) and sent to Goli Otok. She will talk about her traumatic experience in the feuilleton “Ibeovci”, which was published in 1990 in the Serbian newspaper “Borba” and served as raw



Hristina Ivanoska, Document Missing: Performance no. 6 (Daughter), 2022
Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje. Photo: Sonja Stavrova.

material from which Ivanoska built her performance. Ivanoska performed the history of the missing subject, the voice of the women whose stories have not been heard, whose actions have been obliterated, and whose voices have been lost, forgotten, or missing from the national/state archives. Hristina conceptualises, forms and performs the voice that is rejected or stretched through dissonances of the ephemera in history, with no pretension of closing the history book or fetishising the evidence fever. Rather, embodying and reconfiguring different fragments, oral histories, found objects and partial evidence, Ivanoska's identity and body both become porous mediums and transformable material

that, while longing and trying to preserve the past, re-envision and transfigure their present boundaries and meanings. Staging her body as a medium through which different identities and voices from the past are brought back to life, Ivanoska imaginatively performs the missing voice as the in-between space of the lived experience and corporeality and the meaning and sense-making that cut across the historical present of the national public and history, as much as it cut through our gendered and sexual categories and politics.



Hristina Ivanoska, Document Missing: Performance no. 6 (Daughter), 2022.
Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje. Photo: Sonja Stavrova.

Performing the Text, Inventing New BODIES AND SUBJECTIVITIES

In this part, we wanted to include bodies of produced knowledge related to gender and queer politics that we found relevant for performing 'difference' in the very traditional academic surrounding. Firstly, we wanted to acknowledge and draw a map on certain events that marked the creation of critical, feminist and queer discourses related to gender, sex, sexuality, corporeality, power, identity, and performance. On the other hand, we approached this knowledge production and critical scholarship and discourses as being themselves agents of performative force and sites of resistance in a predominantly patriarchal socio-cultural, political and academic context, bringing into being different sets of concepts, understanding and research and opening the possibilities for differential enactments and performances of gender and sexuality. Thus, these concepts, texts, discourses and critical knowledge represent forces that can instigate new practices and materialise alternative worlds and bodies.

In 1999, the **Research Centre for Gender Studies (RCGS)** was established within the **Euro-Balkan Institute** on the initiative of the Women's Program of the Open Society Institute Foundation - Macedonia, with a mission to disseminate academic and scientific knowledge in the field of gender studies and linking theory - i.e., knowledge - with activism. One of the first projects of the Centre was the international conference on the institutionalisation of gender studies organised together with the Faculty of Philosophy in December 1999. The conference was followed by an international summer seminar on gender theory for young scientists from Central and Eastern Europe led by Prof. Judith Butler, organized in Ohrid in 2000. In 2001, the same Centre started publishing the international **Journal on Politics, Gender and Culture 'Identities'**, which we presented as part of the 'Performing the Text, Inventing New Bodies and Subjectivities' corner in the gallery space. The magazine exists today and is part of the Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL), as



Installation view of *Performing the Text*.
Photo: Natasha Geleva.

well as many other databases. It is important to note that at the initiative of the Centre, the **South-East European Gender and Women's Studies Network** was established in 2004 with headquarters in Skopje (RCGS Euro-Balkans) and in Belgrade (Centre for Women's Studies at the Faculty of Political Science).

Another project included in this corner was CAPITAL & GENDER/ *International project for art and theory* that took place from 24-27 January 2001 in Skopje. Capital and Gender was a project that included a conference with theorists, curators, art critics, managers, and artists from different Balkan and other Eastern European countries and dealt with four different topics under the main theme of the project: "the problem of reflecting capital on gender and sexual difference in the countries that are experiencing the

shift from state to market economy." The conference topics and program, which included the public art project *Perfect Match* and web workshops, addressed the "problem of the proliferation of money and information that is influencing the concept of sexual differentiation in the countries where social issues of equality and difference over the past 50 years were structured differently than in the Western countries,"²⁰ as explained by the project **curator Suzana Milevska**. Such was the starting point for the 20 international artists that took part in the project, which was not limited to a gallery space, as artists were invited to produce public art projects for the site connected with the main theme: "the relation between ideal love and capital. Thus, the artists participated interactively in the life of the city, entering the realm of their

20 Suzana Milevska, "Report on Capital & Gender: International Project for Art and Theory, 24-27 January 2001, Skopje," <https://nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-I-0102/msg00269.html>.

investigation with their creation more directly.”²¹
The artists presented their work using different media, with photographs, photo installations, objects, video art projects, and performances. The project resulted in the publication of an edited volume of texts that addressed the project subjects from a theoretical, discursive and artistic perspective.
This event was one of the first to open up questions related to gender, sexuality, sex and pornography, among others. Not long after, in 2005, Kocho Andonovski, on the TV show “Chumu” on A1 Television (television that no longer exists, as it was closed due to its media reactions against Gruevski as well as some financial issues) would be the first person to speak publicly about LGBT rights in Macedonia. Later, the organization MASSO was formed, which started working on LGBT rights.

In this period also, the Journal for culture MARGINA, published by **Templum**, made an impact into performing the transformation or on the developing shift in gender politics and the possibility of a deconstructive understanding of identity in general. The first issue of **Margina** was released in March 1994 and addressed feminism. Until then, there was no journal in the field of culture that dealt with contemporary culture, art, and theory, new media, and translations of contemporary literature or that published critical theory or thinking that involved the body as performative, or as performing otherness or queerness. Through its multiple issues in the past decades, the journal brought poststructuralist and postmodern critiques of identity into the public discourse and art scene, both through theoretical writings and literature and art practices.

21 *Ibid.*

What a Body Can Do? Or Queer Choreographies of Bodily Morphologies and Politics

Almost all of the works that were part of the archive and the exhibition mobilise the multiple intensities, potentials, materialities, meanings and sensations of the body as performative strategies for testing the limits and capaciousness of the normative body. As such they materialise non-normative or queer morphologies by expanding the habituated and sterilised affectability of gendered/normative bodies and bring them forward as livable and desirable bodies deemed as abject in the heteropatriarchal regimes of power. Even so, the work of the dancer/choreographer Aleksandar Georgiev succeeds in putting forward most paradigmatically the Spinozian/Deleuzian question of what the body can do and what are its indefinite and incalculable complexions and powers for transformation through multiple relationalities, extensions and encounters.

Aleksandar Georgiev develops his series of choreographic works related to 'anal politics' referring to the rejected parts of the body, while simultaneously proposing and performing, what we can provisionally call, a corporeal democracy. In **"The Power of S"** from 2021, Aleksandar Georgiev, together with **Zhana Pencheva** and **Darío Barreto Damas**, focuses on the disruption of the normative codes of representation of the part of the body – the 'anus' as a black hole space, as something hidden. Georgiev starts from the physical references, but develops performance relations in dance, using the anus as a metaphor for a monster, a transformable creature that reveals parallel realities and experiences, placing it as the main protagonist of the body in performance. The dance displaces and deconstructs the meanings attached to the anus, proposing it as a moving and performing body that transforms the space and its meaning, especially the sedimented homophobic and masculinist fantasies attached to the anus. It proposes another gaze on it, transforming the stage



Aleksandar Georgiev "Echoes of S", 2022, Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje. Photo: Sonja Stavrova.

and the gaze of the viewer into a queer one, one that can offer another memory, meaning, and position of viewing and thinking about parts of the body that are forbidden, abject or hidden. The abjected body part becomes a movable, transformable, intensive, and polymorphic muscle with unseen potentialities and powers, birthing in rhythmic contractions, closures and openings while seducing the audience from behind, and plugging the spectator into a sort of anal vertigo that decapitates the masculine head of the Western reasoning subject. Implicitly asking us to think of the incalculable ways in which the anus can extend in space, move and transmit intensities and affects and enter in relations with the supporting bodies, the choreographic work brings forward a democracy of all body parts, claiming that all

movements/all bodies matter. As Georgiev says, "the anus is neither economically nor ideologically nor as an identity close to or thriving in today's capitalist world, and that is confusing and self-contradictory, but also self-evident. Due to the fact that the anus does not play any role in the reproduction of mankind, it loses all its value, although it is one of the central muscles that serve for pleasure and daily relief (not only in sex but also for balancing the body and expelling the faeces that the body considers unnecessary). That muscle marks our first steps of independence and emancipation by controlling it, experiencing the first moment when we learn to hold and not wear diapers and manage pleasure as a feeling. The anus does not belong to a certain identity, gender or political feat, it simply coexists



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with all feats precisely somewhere from behind. But in an emancipatory and quite conscious way, he should become part of the political debate and the political way of acting, from behind, from the dark, from the shameful, from the unimportant."²²

Aleksandar Georgiev has further extended this research process into anal politics and "reading from behind" in the landscape choreographic work he developed for our exhibition, and which he performed together with Dario Barreto Damas, as an artistic proposal and collaboration with photographer/photo artist Martin Atanasov.

In **"Echoes of S"** Georgiev creates an environment that activates the spaces between live performance and photography, focusing on the poetic potential the anus entails, both conceptually and physically.

22 Aleksandar Georgiev in: Величковска Мања. 2021. Анусот како критички пункт за ново читање на стварноста одзади. Available at: <https://meduza.mk/fem-101/anusot-kako-kritichki-punkt-za-novo-chitanje-na-stvarnosta-odzadi/>.



"The Power of S" from 2021, Aleksandar Georgiev, together with Zhana Pencheva and Darío Barreto Damas.
Youth Cultural Center, Skopje. Photo: Gorgi Despodov.



Like the bodies which are part of this archive, like the spaces they do, and the worlds they bring into being, this archive and our reading/writing are performative events. It tries to enact, through the force of the concepts and optics used, an open history, especially one that has been put on the margins of the hegemonic regimes of visibility and intel/legibility, as much as a possible future that is desired, a future for a world where the multitude of non-normative, and yet, incalculable, incommensurable bodies and their movements, desires, pleasures, relations and transformations can flourish in-common. Yet, as each performative, the future of this archive is open. Its performative effects could be either felicitous or failed. That future is a demand addressed upon unforeseen others to - come, and their erotically charged looks and touches with these or other materials, some of which might have been overlooked, or are yet to come-to-matter.

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