Taking place: Parrhesiastic Theater as a model for artistic practice

Kamma, E.

III. It's My Artistic Positioning! Where Am I in This: Parrhesia from My Own Position as an Artist. Notes on My Methodology

"The war raged on and I sat there by the sea and looked deep into the heart of humanity. I became my mother, my grandmother, in fact I was all the characters who take part in my play. I learned to travel all their paths and became all of them." (Salomon n.d.)

The Narrator (Eleni Kamma) strikes a selfie in Limburgs Museum wearing a mask made of celluloid.

The Higher Powers Command:
Write from the Perspective of Connectiveness and Conviviality, not of Dichotomy.

The Narrator puts on a colorful transparent mask, makes grimaces, and strikes a selfie. She is in the Limburgs Museum archive in order to conduct research on Limburg's historical carnival costumes and masks. *The Narrator* starts improvising her written manifesto-monologue, reading out loud. In a lively, sentimental tone:

> In 1969, German artist Sigmar Polke created a painting, the title of which was *The Higher Powers Command: Paint the Upper Right Corner Black!* The title also made it into the lower back part of the painting itself. This double status of the text as the title of the work *and* as part of the painting confronts the viewer with several possible readings: that this is a "bluntly satirical version of a painting by Ellsworth Kelly" (Tate n.d. b) as one of the texts accompanying Polke's 1995 solo exhibition *Join the Dots* in the Tate Modern Liverpool suggested; "an acknowledgment of the tacit, built-in mystery of painting: that we don't make art so much as art tells the artist what it wants to be," according to art critic Jerry Saltz (Saltz 2010); or a tongue-in-cheek statement by the artist himself accepting his role "as medium, as way station for commands from higher beings," as described by curator, artist, and art critic Harald Szeemann (Szeemann 2018, 150). In other words, Polke dared to mock and undermine himself as the sole author of the painting, as critic, professor, and editor of *Texte zur Kunst* Isabelle Graw argues (Howard 2015), while at the same time he justified this provocative act by using text in a double way, both as the title of the work *and* as part of the painting. Polke's ironic stance seems in line with Saltz's observation that since his relocation from East to West Germany at the age of twelve, Polke "thought and acted like an outsider, or really a visitor from another esthetic planet" (Saltz 2018).

The Narrator thinks of that painting, and the impression it made on her when she first saw it. She takes a deep breath before continuing:

> At the age of nineteen I entered the School of Mathematics in the University of Patras, Greece. Two years later I gave up mathematics for painting for similar reasons I suspect celebrated artist Joseph Beuys gave up his studies in biology prior to turning to art.[26] I then entered the Athens School of Fine Art, majored in painting (a five-year course) and continued my studies in London, where I completed a master of arts at Chelsea College of Art & Design. Following an intense period of making and exhibiting work between 2003 and 2007, I ended up at the Fine Art Department of the Jan Van Eyck Academie, a "post-academic institute for research and production" in Maastricht, from January 2008 to December 2009. By using that time for reflection, I reshaped my artistic practice into that of a visual artist-researcher with a love/hate relationship to language. Although I thoroughly enjoyed looking at the world around me in silence — observing attitudes and situations — and expressing my thoughts through drawing and painting, a need to share my findings with others in ways that expanded from the visual realm into the social dimensions of art, including the notion of participation, intensified over time. Words, sentences, and other linguistic tools found their way into my practice. I became increasingly attracted and repelled at the same time by the dangers, limitations, and traps that words most often offer in exercising authority, controlling what we call communication*, turning sensorial experience into descriptions, translations, and other semantic systems. To give an example of how the use of words may limit instead of enable global-scale "universal" communication, in 2019 a scientific study of comparative linguistics published in the journal *Science*, the largest such study so far, concluded that terms for emotions ("anger," "fear," and so on) "vary in meaning across languages, even if they are often equated in translation dictionaries" (Jackson et al. 2019).

26 Beuys described his encounter with a lecture on biology to artist, writer and publicist Georg Jappe as follows: "I experienced the fact that this man devoted his life to a few small animalcule-like creatures. That terrified me so much that I said: no, that is not my understanding of science" (Ray 2001, 186).

Moving along a Moebius Strip

I, *The Narrator* who mainly speaks with the voice of the *Engaged Artist*, often ask myself: why do I have this urge to move back and forth between mediums?

Since 2016 I have committed myself to examining, through the use of artistic tools and methods from visual arts, performance, and film, the conditions that can allow for the opening up of a parrhesiastic space in the field of art. Throughout this examination, my viewpoint continually shifts between the positions of artist and researcher, my practice being situated between monologue and dialogue. I define my internal monologue as those parts of the practice which I conduct myself in the studio as well as those for which I work with others but take my own decisions and personally assume responsibility for the outcome. I consider as a dialogue all the other parts, ranging from research to artistic collaborations, in which I reach out to others and develop both the thinking and outcome through exchange and interaction with them. I have therefore been working along a Moebius-strip schema, which keeps shifting or circulating from me as individual artist (through drawings and objects), to dialogic collaborations (such as the journal *Paroikeo*, talking activities, performative events, and short films), and writing about the process. My research subject is investigated through a circulation process within which concepts such as communication, dialogue, and listening are continuously performed and put to the test.

In the past two years I have become increasingly interested in performative strategies. The reasons for this are twofold. First, I find performance* to be the most appropriate medium for reflecting on current conditions of daily life (such as precarity, materiality versus virtual life, individualism versus the collective, and cultural specificities versus European politics/economics). Second, my research subject specifically asks for developing ways of working with others that test the limits of what it means to speak up today and, eventually, what this means for a community of people living together. I increasingly consider myself to be a practitioner in the sociocultural field: as someone who (through artistic media) situates and expresses herself in relation to (with*, against*, through*) others. In my case, the discourse and practice are situated at the intersection between visual arts, performance and film. I advocate hybridity*, not because of indecisiveness, but because of its promise of openness. Used as a testing ground, such intersections offer the possibility of a critical distance, allowing a rethinking of otherwise unshaken certainties within each field.

So, how do I move in and through this research? It seems I need several other bodies (and their voices) in order to move. These bodies and voices are, among others, those of the artists whose strategies of parrhesia I analyze in Chapter II, the performers I have collaborated with, and the academics, artists, and peers I have entered into a dialogue with throughout this research. During one of our meetings, my supervisor Janneke Wesseling observed that I am in the middle of things. This back-and-forth movement is my way of marking the territory I am investigating. I just started this investigation, and moving in one direction does not help me think, question, or doubt things; moving back and forth does. I like to think through the contrast between modern clichéd phrases regarding time and direction, such as: "the future

lies in front of you" and "facing the future," and the terminology of Ancient Babylonians which indicated that they, on the contrary, considered the past as laying in front of them. I need to move back and forth, test again and again, until what I am looking for becomes experienced, embodied knowledge.

Here I will provide an example of how I am led through my methodology to the realization of artistic work, by describing my solo exhibition *Oh, for some more Amusement!* at the contemporary art center Netwerk in Aalst, Belgium, in April 2015. It attempted to bridge the conceptual and temporal gap between the forms and methods used by people speaking out in public space today and the historical *Karagöz*. Taking its format from the circle created by the audience surrounding the *Ortaoyunu actors*, the exhibition consisted of three video installations, two objects (reconstructions of the *Ortaoyunu* theatrical props), and the first issue of *ΠΑΡΟΙΚΕΩ*, a printed journal. Written and edited by performer Michiel Reynaert, psychoanalyst Bibi Straatman, critic Pieter Van Bogaert, and myself, the journal was published on the occasion of the exhibition. *ΠΑΡΟΙΚΕΩ* issue I compiled the following content: archival material on the political role of Karagöz shadow theater in the Ottoman Empire, photos I had taken during the Gezi Park protests, written transcriptions of Turkish protesters testifying to their experiences of the events in 2013 from my video interviews, and email correspondence between the four editors, who are based in Belgium and the Netherlands.

In my video installation *Play it, Emin: Walking along the Russian Monument at Ayastefanos* (2014), which was part of the above-mentioned exhibition, a historical event is used to provoke thoughts about political conditions today. In the two-channel video, *Karagöz* master Emin Senyer appears on the right-hand screen, reenacting through his puppets the demolition of the Russian Monument at Ayastefanos, a memorial erected in 1898 to celebrate Russia's victory during the Crimean War of 1877–78. Its demolition by Istanbul's *Union and Progress Party* in November 1914 was an event of staged propaganda, orchestrated shortly after the Ottoman Empire's entry to the First World War. In addition, the demolition is thought to have been filmed by the first Turkish filmmaker, Fuat (Uzkınay) Bey, and although no traces of the film have survived, it is officially considered to mark the beginning of Turkish national cinema (Mutlu 2007, 75–6). On the left-hand screen a tracking shot moves along the path up to the Ayastefanos monument in the Istanbul suburb of Florya, filmed in 2013 at a walking pace, with intertitles superimposed on top of the footage. The intertitles provide official historical information (newspaper sources) about the event, and about its filmic registration by Fuat (Uzkınay) Bey. On the screen to the right, we see *Karagöz* master Emin Senyer reenacting the subject of the unpreserved film — based on three photo-documents of the monument taken before, during, and after the explosion, and a description of the event found in the personal memoirs of the lieutenant who did the exploding — with a humorous trick; on the left-hand screen we simultaneously read intertitles describing an upcoming agreement between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to unilaterally reconstruct destroyed Russian monuments and tombstones in Turkey (including the monument in question) and Turkish monuments and tombstones in Russia, as announced in Turkish newspapers in 2012. While the narrative unfolds, what is actually being explored in *Play it, Emin* is the relation of an event to testimony and its representation. In *Play it, Emin*, meaning is produced in the gaps in time concerning the specific location of the monument.

Research into Old Forms. Connecting Past to Present Practices, the Cynic — the Fool

Following her Istanbul experience, *The Narrator* started looking for historical contexts, museums, and archives related to old popular practices of entertainment in the geographic areas of Belgium, Dutch Limburg, and Athens. Festivities such as carnivals, celebrations, and parades have traditionally been identified as settings for the production of communal laughter. German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that "all festive experiences … allow no separation between one person and another" (Gadamer 1986, 39). When individuals participate in such events, they essentially look at the world from a personal, affective point of view, embodying the political in society through their participation.

Thanks to Limburgs Museum conservator Frank Holthuizen, *The Narrator* was encouraged to systematically explore that museum's archives. She had the opportunity to visit both its video archives and costumes collection on several occasions. Riet Sax, a Limburgs Museum volunteer, opened up boxes of the costumes for her and showed her several costumes and masks from various historical periods.

The costumes of a particular costume designer, Thérèse Gorissen from Maastricht — a city of 120,000 inhabitants in the southeast Netherlands known for its cultural activities and large number of national heritage buildings (second after Amsterdam) — were particularly fascinating, firstly because of their complex construction design and sculptural qualities, and secondly because of the identity (and representation) issues they raise about Gorissen's own role as a maker and as a Carnival participant wearing these exaggerated, slightly distorted, and extravagant stereotypes of femininity.






Research into costumes and masks at Limburg Museum, hosting the Costumes collection of the former Museum of Echt (now closed), Venlo, The Netherlands. 2017–2019

The Narrator felt touched by the effort and time that Thérèse Gorissen invested in her designs. Gorissen's costumes seemed autobiographical and of a critical, humorous disposition. Was she daily performing a mocking self-portrait throughout the making of the costume, during her year-long preparations for Carnival? Was she, like a Louise Bourgeois doppelganger, repairing and transforming her everyday life by cutting and assembling the tissues, ties, and bits and pieces for the reversed world of Carnival?

The figure of the medieval Nar is still present in Dutch Carnival today. The English translation for "Nar" is jester or fool. In the Netherlands, the Prince of Carnival is the Prince of Fools. The jester would wear a hat with the long ears of an ass (donkey), a remnant from Rome's Saturnalia and the medieval donkey feast (Champfleury 1867, 191–2), and had bells sewn on his costume. To some extent, analogies could be drawn between the figures of the traditional jester and the Cynic philosopher.

Firstly, both the jester and the Cynic practice unlimited freedom of speech and exercise parrhesia by addressing local political and/or social misconduct through laughter*. The jester speaks and acts bluntly through the marrote, a "scepter" which consists of an emblematic replica of the jester's head on a wooden stick, and costume. The spectators seemingly laugh along with the situation they are presented with, but they are actually also laughing at themselves being reflected in the jester's overly theatricalized activities and gestures. This resonates in a distant way with Cynic philosophers, using the street as stage, often narrating stories, comic jokes, and ironic anecdotes to provoke laughter* from their audience; they aimed at passing on "schemas of conduct" through these methods rather than through doctrines, and creating a new traditionality (Foucault 2011, 208–9). The spirit of the medieval Nar/jester is central to experiencing Carnival. Reflected in each other's overly theatrical activities and gestures, Carnival participants laugh at the situation they are presented with (the others), but also at themselves.

Secondly, the jester and the Cynic philosopher both occupy a peculiar position in the margins of the social structure. As Michel Foucault notes, "Cynicism is always both inside and outside philosophy (the familiarity and strangeness of Cynicism in relation to the philosophy which serves as its context, milieu, vis-à-vis, opponent and enemy)" (Foucault 2011, 237). Both jester and Cynic philosopher are free to speak their minds because of the specific quality of the space allocated to them: a space for one who is weird, poor, ridiculous, and on the fringes of society.

A not-so-marginal contemporary version of the jester can be encountered in the still-alive local tradition of the buuteredners in Limburg. It is a South Limburg version of the traditional *fool* or *court jeste*r. Jan Heffels, a contemporary buuteredner from Sittard, argues that buuteredners "try to 'pour in words'. This can be done by telling a joke, or a pun, or at least an unexpected twist in relation to the mindset of the people and putting them on the wrong track, hoping that it will catch on."[27] With Heffels and Dutch artist, writer, and curator Joep Vossebeld, I entered into a discussion that led to a collaboration; I was first invited by Joep to take part in the group exhibition *Sittard, wat verbeeld jij-je?*, which he curated at Sittard Museum, De Domijnen, and in turn I invited Jan to perform in the context of the exhibition.

Revitalizing or appropriating* an old popular entertainment practice within a specific locality can trigger social awareness and enable the expression of political consciousness. This triggering happens because exercising old popular participatory entertainment practices can evoke feelings of familiarity to a local audience, reminding them of their primary experiences of freedom of expression within such entertainment. In their pleasingly or strikingly old-fashioned qualities, these practices serve the collective public memory and invite viewers to critically activate themselves. The way in which old local practices and narrating traditions prompt audiences fits, perhaps surprisingly, with descriptions of political consciousness by Latin American members of JASS, a non-profit organization "dedicated to strengthening the voice, visibility, and collective organizing power of women" as "an interactive process that involves four overlapping levels of consciousness. These range from passive (accepting roles of subordination as natural) to questioning (asking why) to analytical (naming and analyzing

27 Jan Heffels interviewed by Joep Vossebeld in the video *Cursus voor Buuteredners*, which made part of my homonymous installation in group exhibition *Sittard,Wat verbeeld jij je?*, 2019.

oppressive situations) and finally to active-critical consciousness (developing a critical analysis of inequitable systems and structures and taking action with others to transform them)" (Miller 2002). Accessing the dormant powers of formerly popular local entertainment practices can only happen through exchange and co-creation with people connected to the local practices and narrating traditions that I, as an artist and researcher, am investigating.

My installation *Cursus voor Buuteredners* (Lessons for Buuterdners) (2019) serves as an example of how a popular traditional practice of entertainment can be used to generate thoughts about contemporary life, events, and situations. *Cursus voor Buuteredners* was part of the group exhibition *Sittard, wat verbeeld jij-je?* at Sittard Museum. On the occasion of Sittard's celebration to mark its having had city rights for 775 years, artist and curator Joep Vossebeld invited eleven artists to "reflect on the city's past, its identity and possible visions about the future" (Vossebeld n.d.). I borrowed the title of my installation from a video that I discovered in the archives of the Limburg Museum; the video was part of an episode of the weekly documentary television series *Van Gewest tot Gewest*, which reports on regional topics, presented by Jantine de Jonge and broadcast on 9 November 1993 by NOS.[28] It showed how established buuterderners try to keep their tradition alive by welcoming and training a younger generation in their art. My installation consisted of several drawn studies of my parrhesiastic Characters (see pages 65–74 of this Chapter and pages 135–163 of Appendix 1); a maquette depicting the central Sittard Markt inhabited by several drawn paper models of recent local protests in Limburg, based on documentation I found on the internet and in newspapers (Sittarders demonstrating for better salaries; others in Heerlen speaking out publicly against the controversial tradition of Zwarte Piet, a black-face character that has become part of the annual feast of St Nicholas on December 5; demonstrators against the demolition of their public garden); and a video film. The video film shows local buuteredner Jan Heffels in action on January 5, 2019, performing two of his jokes several times in the middle of Sittard Market Place, attracting a local audience. For the occasion of the video film, Jan was also briefly interviewed by Joep Vossebeld. I had sent Joep my questions beforehand, hoping that he could find a way to tackle the following issues: would Jan have a peculiar story to share, regarding truths told and surprising or confrontational reactions from the audience? What makes a buuteredner funny? What are the talents or qualities a buuteredner needs to develop in order to tell a joke and win over the audience? How does Jan understand "speaking freely" (*vranke [spreken], vrije meningsuiting*)? What is at play in the process of conceiving of and telling a joke? Is *where* Jan tells the joke important? By playing with the things that people in their own lives take very seriously, does a buuteredner deliberately test the limits of politics? Is he working on the conditions in which politics become possible? We recorded his answers and his performances.

28 https://zoeken.beeldengeluid.nl/program/urn:vme:default:program:2101608050040888631?ac=dgtl&q=buutteredner, accessed April 12, 2021.

To questions such as "Is it a buuteredner's task to reveal uncomfortable truths? If yes, how do these affect his audience?" and "what is the role of the buuterdner in public space today, if public space is a space where one is confronted with what other people think and how they live their lives?" Heffels answered as follows:

> originally, the buuteredner was there to sting a bit and to stand on a platform and expose all abuses in a place. Now that lessened a bit, becoming more general and the buut has become, yes, on that point, shallower. And we are not comedians either in the sense that we speak real, harsh humor. It is all a bit milder.... More "Limburg," you could say. The cosiness is more highly regarded than bullying people. "It may smell, but it should not stink," they say here. The main goal is to make them relax and laugh and not to put a finger on every sore spot.[29]

Not putting a finger on a sore spot is not always feasible, especially when it comes to questions of otherness and how a "we" is to be understood in contemporary heterogeneous urban communities. Two of the images I used for the maquette were photographs of protesters holding placards with "Zwarte Piet Is Racisme" slogans. It was Quinsy Gario (1984–), a Dutch performance artist born in Curacao, who created this slogan and started that project in June 2011. I interviewed Quinsy online on April 20, 2020 about his practice, and asked him about his involvement, to which he responded by confirming both his awareness of the specific protest *and* his lack of personal involvement. In his own words:

> I created the slogan and then after it fulfilled my intention of boosting those who wanted to speak out publicly, I bowed out in 2012. The *Zwarte Piet Is Racisme* project intentionally blurred the line between artist, participant, and spectator. I've switched places now from artist to spectator and a lot of people have gone from spectator to participant to artist. For me it's important to note that I am the artist behind the piece, so as not to get lost in the annals of history because of bad citational practices around the artistic work of racialized people, but also that the work was intentionally conceived for people to take ownership of it and run with it as they saw fit.[30]

In her essay "The Politics of Public Things," Bonnie Honig, a political, feminist, and legal theorist who specializes in democratic theory, explores how British psychoanalyst D. H. Winnicott's objects relation theory might be relevant and correspond to the importance of public things for a healthy democracy's "holding environment."[31] Honig draws analogies between the objects' necessary role in human development from infancy to maturity, as transitional objects (a term Winnicott coined) between mother-dependency and independence, and citizens' attachments to public things, which are, she argues, constitutive elements of democracy (Honig 2013, 62). By examining specific cases of public things being under pressure

29 Jan Heffels interviewed by Joep Vossebeld in the video *Cursus voor Buuteredners*, which made part of my homonymous installation in group exhibition *Sittard, Wat verbeeld jij je?*, 2019.

30 Email exchange, May 20, 2020, following our online discussion on May 7, 2020. For Quinsy Gario's statement following his end of the *Zwarte Piet Is Racisme* piece, see: https://zwartepietisracisme-blog.tumblr.com/post/35566690735/mijn-kunstproject-is-geslaagd-omdat-het-zichzelf.

31 The essay *The Politics of Public Things*: *Neoliberalism and the Routine of Privatization* by Dr Bonnie Honig is an excerpt from a longer lecture given as part of three lectures in the 'Thinking Out Loud' series (2013) in Sydney, Australia, hosted by the University of Western Sydney, forthcoming in *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair* with Fordham University Press. It was part of ΠΑΡΟΙΚΕΩ issue 2, which was published on the occasion of the international group exhibition *πλάνητες* (planites) held between 28 January 2017 – 17 March 2017 and organized in the context of the inaugural events programme of the Cultural Capital of Europe, Pafos2017. Edited by Eleni Kamma and Elena Parpa.

in the US,[32] Honig argues that in the context of democratic theory (as opposed to neoliberal contexts) things serve other purposes than efficiency, because "in health, democracy is rooted in common love for shared objects, or even in contestation of them" (Honig 2013, 60). As with Winnicott's mother-figure and healthy object relations, in democracy public things are there when needed. But then — and here Honig departs from Winnicott — this is a reciprocal relationship: as citizens we are responsible for tending for such objects in a democracy. She distinguishes between neoliberal economies always looking at the end result and democratic theory focusing on "the generative power of things, and their magical properties to enchant, alter, interpellate, join, equalize, or mobilize us" (Honig 2013, 69). If, following Winnicott, it is the object that "enables the child to exit continuity with the mother to experience contiguity in and with the world in a healthy way," what about object-deprived citizens? Honig suggests that they need to take the initiative by looking out for or initiating ways to set up a "healthy" democratic holding environment (Honig 2013, 70). In the third and final part of her essay, Honig arrives at the importance of imagination and play as resources, especially for those humans deprived from a holding environment. By embracing one's status of deprivation, one may "adopt common tactics in response to the majority that marginalizes them: laughter, irony, and the pariah's mocking infiltration of, or resistance to, the dominant culture that excludes him" (Honig 2013, 72). Honig concludes by leaving the reader to contemplate "the sort of thing — hybrid, public, magical, and nutritional — that might have the power to enchant future citizenships" (Honig 2013, 73–74).

Here I wish to offer a short story about a personal experience of the thingness of public things: for its second issue, *ΠΑΡΟΙΚΕΩ*, the journal I initiated in 2015, moved to Paphos, where it participated in *Planites*, the opening exhibition of Pafos2017 European Capital of Culture. *ΠΑΡΟΙΚΕΩ* II aspired to negotiate the politics of public things and public space within Paphos' historical and social contexts. The public library of Paphos opened in 1946 thanks to Christodoulos Galatopoulos (1902–53), its visionary mayor. A revolutionary once imprisoned by the English, Galatopoulos was passionate about poetry and books and he published a local newspaper. During my research trip in the summer of 2016, no local journals or old publications were on display — they had been locked away since the library's renovation, rotting in the basement, not accessible to researchers or the public. I was lucky to discover a few copies of Galatopoulos' newspaper in Paphos' high school. In one, dated February 1945, I found a passionate open letter from Galatopoulos, in which he addressed the repeated destruction of public *things* by unidentified individuals. The second issue of *ΠΑΡΟΙΚΕΩ* consists of a reworked version of Honig's essay, my Paphos photo essay about the reshaping of public space due to the "Capital of Culture" funding, and the mayor's republished letter. The essays in *ΠΑΡΟΙΚΕΩ* are considered both as texts and as "public things" to be shared.

In *Cursus voor Buuteredners*, meaning is produced around the controversies of "tradition" through the compiling of heterogeneous audiovisual and textual material regarding the disappearance of a single marginal public figure with the power to unite people through laughter. How to deal with funny public "traditional" figures that some want to preserve, but that are actually offensive and racist and in need of erasure when seen in a different light or from another's perspective? The installation invites the visitor to rethink the present politics of public things and public space while moving in retrograde through Limburg's historical and social context.

32 Honig discusses the TV program *Sesame Street* and specifically the character Big Bird in relation to funding cuts to US public television networks and the use of public telephones during Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

Enacting Parrhesia (Me in the Middle)

In parallel to my research into old popular practices of entertainment in Belgium, Dutch Limburg, and Athens, I started investigating how I, as an artist, can enact parrhesia. By imagining answers to the question of how can I dare to take up a position, how I can speak my mind, I made a number of drawings with myself at the center. The drawings were created by selecting, cutting, placing, copying via carbon paper, and painting various heterogeneous fragment-depictions of bodies, clothes, and props into a mise en scène: a Cypro-Archaic vase, a hand cut out from a Belgian socialist poster, a badge used in contemporary Dutch lessons, the Mestreechter Geis sculpture and its plinth, a mantle decorated with Greek shadow-theater types in the colors of the Greek flag and worn around the body, and so on and so forth. In every case, the model for each character is me. I draw myself again and again for each drawing, in an attempt to embody these characters and incorporate traces of myself and my body among selected fragments. Each fragment retains information about its origin; they are traces of regional comic traditions and vary in terms of origin, cultural background, and historical time.

In these drawings the image is constructed through a compositional logic of putting together and juxtaposing pre-existing heterogeneous images and meanings. Although I "glue" together representations, cultural references, and layers of meaning that are not necessarily meant to belong together, the fact that I work mainly with pencils and aquarelle gives the compositions a material homogeneity. My drawings express a longing for a return to an image before the historical knowledge of its visual fragmentation. They incorporate a desire for some kind of reterritorialization. Mine is a meticulous activity that gathers, glues, associates, and connects independent elements on a spatial plane or in time, on a drawing, a ground plan of a building, or a moving image. It works on paper, on film, as a projection, or on a screen as a controlled two-dimensional representation of reality.

I began imagining and thinking through these drawings. Upon my giving them names, they transformed into studies for several parrhesiastic character-types. I invented a game — an imaginary parrhesiastic parade — of which the parrhesiastic character-types would be the future participants (for example, *The Drunk, The Fool, The Angry*, and so on). It would be a parade of attempts, events, and manifestations that, inspired by artistic methods of entertainment, laughter*, and excess* from the past, would question how parrhesia* can be tried out, rehearsed, performed, and put to the test.

Why a Parade?

The parade is first of all a device or model to help me explore the possibilities of visualization, actualization and practice of aspects of parrhesiastic theater*. The model develops around sequences of scenes of a parrhesiastic theater* parade as an "event". This event* will be filmed. The parade is founded on old, traditional characters, popular practices of entertainment and events. These will be transformed with the help of drawings and objects into a contemporary typology of characters, roles, and their possible interactions with new ones, mainly caricatured post-internet characters and situations. These interactions will happen through the appropriation*, reenactment, and rehearsal* of certain acts. As part of the research process, some of these characters, both individuals and groups, will be realized, with actual costumes and using props to enable them to interact with real people in contemporary time and space, through a series of actions. These actions* include speech, jokes, gestures that invite the audience to judge, reflect, react in relation to the notion of parrhesia*. The characters embody traces of the comic traditions of their regions and move alongside the city's urban tissue. The parade will take shape through an ongoing investigation process into the simultaneous, interdependent relations between the description of the parade and aspects of its actualization. The actualizations I consider as case studies.

The parade develops halfway between a cultural allegory of contemporary Europe and an invocation of a community of old parrhesiastic laughers. In exploring *other* ways of speaking — as the etymology of the term suggests (*allos* means "other" in Greek) — and producing arbitrary relations between image and language, allegory has often been used as a weapon against unjust situations. In his essay "Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art," critic and writer Jan Verwoert reads post-modernist critic Craig Owens' understanding of allegory in *The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism* (1980) "as a composite sign made up of a cluster of dead symbols which are collaged together to create a shabby composition, a signifier in ruins that exposes the ruin of signification." (Verwoert 2007, 4). His reading of Owens is part of a larger frame within which Verwoert examines recurring themes around the subject of appropriation in American critical art discourse of the 1970s and 1980s — including Douglas Crimp and Fredric Jameson, as well as Owens. In looking at appropriation's perceptual shifts from the late 1970s to the beginning of the millennium, between its momentum in the 1980s and today, Verwoert al-

locates the difference to "a decisive shift in the relation to the object of appropriation — from the re-use of a dead commodity fetish to the invocation of something that lives through time." (Verwoert 2007, 3). The parade's Characters are certainly not dead. They are carriers of historical knowledge and invoke collective memory. They are revitalizers of dormant powers within specific localities.

The reasons I selected the parade as the form for my research were the following:

1. Whether military, carnivalistic, or as a mode of protest, parades form and address a social body. During carnival, people lose their everyday individuality and experience a heightened sense of social unity through the use of masks and costumes. The aim of a parade is to demonstrate, to expose, to make visible — whether this be the power of the conqueror or the grandeur of a celebration. Parrhesiastic practices also aim at making visible and exposing, but they are concerned with issues such as an injustice done to the city or a corrupt sovereign.
2. A parade engages with public space in two ways. It is a moveable temporary public space in itself, and at the same time, in theatricalizing existing public space, it traverses, permeates, and disrupts. A parade challenges the given order of things and therefore has the potential to activate and transform the spaces of the city it moves through.
3. Parallels could be drawn between the movements involved in comedy as process[33] and those involved in a *Triumph of Parrhesia Parade*, based on laughter* and excess*.

As a device, the parade would enable me to:

1. define the main concepts and a network of concepts related to parrhesiastic theater*
2. understand and analyze historical examples of parrhesiastic theater*
3. detect where we (contemporary viewers, participants and makers) are now in comparison to these examples
4. appropriate, reenact, and partially revive these examples to enable this detection
5. disseminate and diffuse the material resulting from the above

The parade develops and will be described in four stages. The parade develops in a synthetic process, from each character and the costumes and props that she will use, to the interactions between the characters and to strategies of visualization. This includes the specific locations and environments in which such scenes of interaction happen. The parade's description is an investigation into the production of parrhesiastic laughter*, including the exercises, interstices, doubts, and spaces between the will to share one's opinions through comic situations with the public and the actualization of these situations.

1. The starting point of this description is the development of various characters who exercise the courage to speak their minds in common view, through acts* of laughter* and excess*. These character-types are rooted in European art, cinema, and theater, and they point towards the creation of an agonistic space.
2. The next stage is the analysis of how parrhesiastic practices take place through these characters and their interactions. Like me as artist/researcher, the characters move

33 See Alenka Zupancic, *The Odd One In, On Comedy*. In her book, through a philosophical and psychoanalytic approach, Zupancic examines the practices at work in the practice of comedy. According to Zupancic, comedy as process involves various techniques and procedures, while being in constant motion.

along a Mobius strip that continually shifts from an individual practicing a monologue to dialogical collaborative attempts and failures among these individuals.
3. Stage 3 is about strategies of visualization. Visually, the parade builds up around cinematic and theatrical methods and strategies that enable the investigation of related terms and concepts, such as close-up, affection-image, action-image, and repetition. This part of the description includes the spaces where such scenes of interaction happen and the cinematic elaboration of these parts, as well as some kind of script.
In between Stages 3 and 4 is where the rehearsal-parade-theater-play would be.
4. Stage 4 could be considered the outcome, the montage, where the three other stages come together.

A glossary develops through the writing process, enriching the description. The words of the glossary are indicated with a star.

The characters of the parrhesiastic parade

The parade consists of twenty-five characters, appearing both as individuals and as groups. Although my Characters are fictional, they are informed by characters from popular culture, art, theater, and cinema who purposefully risk speaking their minds through scenes of laughter* and excess*. Embodying traces of the comic traditions of their regions, they move alongside the city's urban tissue. Creating urban scenographies in motion, they reflect upon the history of parrhesiastic theater* and look at the future of an agonistic* space. Demonstrating various strategies of language, image, and gesture as employed for parrhesiastic purposes, they are often confronted by caricatured post-internet characters and situations. The pool of Characters with their full descriptions can be visited in Appendix 1, on pages 135–148. Here I provide a few indicative examples.

Character 1: *The Collector of Proverbs*

This character collects proverbs, and then demonstrates them as a parade of human folly. The *Collector of Proverbs* shares the penchant for brief popular epigrams with Erasmus, Brueghel, and other 16th-century European intellectuals. Erasmus first published his *Adages*, a collection of 800 proverbs and quotations, in 1500. By constantly revising and expanding this collection until his death in 1536, Erasmus made the *Adages* "an unbelievably rich reference work that was consulted by virtually every orator and writer of the day" (Branden 1995,

34). In *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (2006), Walter S. Gibson, a well-known scholar of 16th-century Netherlandish art, cites several images and textual sources which show that the "literal depiction of proverbs constituted an important source of wit in this period, both in the written and spoken word and in art" (Gibson 2006, 40–1).

Bruegel's 1559 painting *Netherlandish Proverbs* is a striking demonstration of visual wit in its depiction of "between 85 and 126 proverbs … acted out in a setting of village and countryside" (Gibson 2006, 43) in one comprehensive spatial setting: a "proverb country." A woman in a red dress in the middle of the picture, for example, puts a blue cloak on her husband, which suggests that she is cheating on him ("Zij hangt haar man de blauwe huik om").[34] According to Gibson, *Netherlandish Proverbs* was "painted mainly to provoke laughter at the absurdities involved in taking proverbs literally" (Gibson 2006, 148). François Rabelais' representation of proverbs through accumulative actions in his Pantagruel novel series (c. 1532–c. 1564), is considered the most famous literary parallel to Bruegel's painting.

Scene:
Three *Collectors of Proverbs* (one Belgian, one Dutch, and one Greek) use various ethnicity-related proverbs to jokingly fight over the seven concepts of *Democracy, Prosperity, Solidarity, Language, Migration, Pluralism,* and *Europe*.

Character 2: *The Animal*

Stills from tests during *Artistic Research in Caricature*. Jessica van Rüschen and Sahra Huby exploring movements and interactions for *The Animal*.

In the ancient Roman and Greek traditions, animals were used in satire to parody human behavior (Champfleury 1867, 106). Between the 16th and 18th centuries, sculptures of human-animal hybrids (human bodies with animal heads) appeared in European churches, in an attempt to amuse the eyes of the religious (Champfleury 1870, 38).

The Animal character delivers a "speech" that demonstrates that we humans are also animals, and provokes laughter by reminding us of our "primitive" substance. The Animal touches upon issues related to civil society, good manners, disciplinary measures, and the suppression of laughter. It does so through its physical presence, gestures, and the body language it assumes in surrounding spaces.

34 See interactive website https://bruegel.analog.is., accessed April 20, 2021.

The Animal growls ... Grrrrrrrr wwwooooof ccccccivil society ha ha ha ah.
The Animal touches the screen.
The Animal licks the ceiling. Woof, miauwww.
The Animal crawls, smells, scratches, and scans the space with their eyes.
The Animal knows no shame.

Character 3: *The Fool*

> And let me tell you, fools have another gift which is not to be despised. They're the only ones who speak frankly and tell the truth, and what is more praiseworthy than truth?
> (Erasmus 1511, 56)

The jester is a recurring figure throughout history, in the form of Greek and Roman "ridicule" mimes, the medieval court jester, the clown, the fool, and roguish figures. Typical of the jester is wit and a special privilege to express personal opinion or the voice of the people to those in power — provided it is humorous or ridiculous. The jester's role is closely related to freedom of expression.

The Medieval *Fool* is traditionally represented by a costume that includes a hat and a bauble, which is the *Fool*'s "scepter" and consists of an emblematic replica of the *Fool*'s head on a wooden stick. The sound that accompanies the *Fool* is that of bells sewn into his or her hat and/or costume.

Actions:
The bauble is semi-autonomous with respect to *The Fool*; for example the bauble might start satirizing a person or situation, while *The Fool* defends the same thing, leading to an argument between the bauble and *The Fool*.

An interesting chapter in William Willeford's *The Fool and His Scepter* (1969) is "The Fool, the Boundary, and the Center," in which among other elements he analyzes how the fool's relation to the social border is brilliantly explored in two of Charlie Chaplin's films: at the beginning of A *Dog's Life* (1918) and at the close of *The Pilgrim* (1922).

Character 4 (Post-Internet): *The Selfie-Junkie*

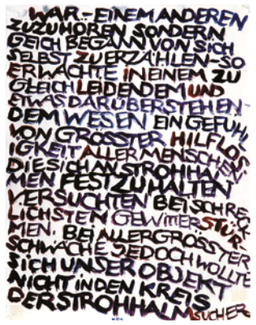
Scene: The Fool and The Selfie-Junkie antagonize and confront each other through mirroring.

The Selfie-Junkie is a character derived from contemporary social-media culture and represents an evolution of *The Fool*. The character is self-focused and places their own self in a picture frame, often against the background of a recognizable location. *The Selfie-Junkie* is simultaneously inside and outside this site: physically present, but more concerned with the distribution of their own image through the space of social media. *The Selfie-Junkie* makes self-portraits in the form of photos or videos with the surroundings in the background: the parade, the bystanders, passersby, the city. Although The Selfie-Junkie behaves in a ridiculous way, she has the knowledge and power to make use of social media's potential as an increasingly important site for protest, inclusiveness, and parrhesiastic practices in the post-internet era.

Prop(s):
The phone, the selfie stick, GoPro, other equipment.

Actions (to be performed individually, but possibly by several participants):
Between two and three dimensions. *The Selfie-Junkie* as a character in the Agora. Turning around his or herself, using different tempos (slow and quick). Live-streaming. *The Selfie-Junkie* acts as broadcaster or master of ceremonies. Underlining the constant tension of experiencing life between two dimensions (the digital realm) and three dimensions (the realm of the physical body) today. As a character, *The Selfie-Junkie* offers us the opportunity to think about the various senses and how, when combined, they can expose truths or deceive.

Character 8: *The One Who Has Nothing to Lose (After Charlotte Salomon)*

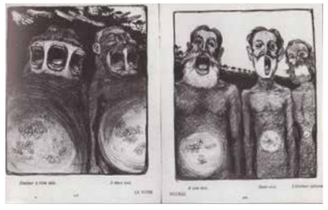


"Looking at death in the eye,"[35] this character is well aware that her time is up. "Driven by the question: whether to take her own life or undertake something wildly unusual" (Salomon n.d.), she chooses to start a passionate project that includes drawing, talking, performing, and writing. She performs an excessive, feverish speech activity, and has tremendous energy.

She is compelled to undertake this activity because of an urgent need to testify to her own experience of the catastrophic time-space she occupies.[36] In this peculiar time-space of excessive creativity in anticipation of a forthcoming disaster, Charlotte finds numerous ways to put together language and image in an almost filmic way, by constantly alternating her own position between subject and object, while operating within a very limited economy of mediums: layers of gouaches and paper.

Charlotte's relationship to parrhesia is pretty straightforward, almost dogmatic: she is convinced of the importance of speaking out one's truth for the common good. This is obvious in the text accompanying image 715 of *Life? Or Theater* (1941–43), where she encourages her grandmother, who has just attempted to commit suicide to "... make use of the same powers to describe your life? I am sure there must be some interesting material that weighs on you, and by writing it down you will liberate yourself and perhaps perform a service to the world. There aren't that many good books representing universal truths, and your book would be among those. I'm absolutely sure of that. You can start right now. Here are paper and pencil" (Salomon n.d.).

Character 9: *The Angry*



35 Paula and Albert Salomon interviewed by Georg Stefan Troller for *Pariser Journal* (WDR), 1963. YouTube video, 6:15. Available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlytljkojGo (uploaded on March 25, 2015, accessed April 18, 2017).

36 See Mieke Bal 2006.

The Angry feels that her voice is not heard. This Character's mouth (see figure at top right of my drawing of *The Angry*) is white or effaced, making direct reference to *l'electeur aphone* (the voiceless voter) in the lithograph *Le Vote Plural* (1902) by Czech painter and graphic artist František Kupka. The lithograph was a caricature of the practice of plural voting, valid in Belgium and the UK at the time. It appeared in issue No 57 of *L'Assiette au Beurre*, an illustrated satirical French weekly, published in May 1902.

On March 31, 2018 in Leuven, Belgium, during her opening lecture of this year's Philosophy Festival,[37] Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe reminded the audience that the issue of voiceless voters is still topical. In her lecture, titled *The Affects of Democracy*, Mouffe referred to the Indignados' motto in Spain — "We have a vote, but we don't have a voice" — as a concrete confirmation of her argument that "not providing the possibility for an agonistic confrontation between different political projects deprives the citizen of real voice in the elections." For Mouffe, there is no democracy without an agonistic confrontation, and this is why — she argues today we live in a post-democracy.

In my drawing, *The Angry* is accompanied — or confronted — by two post-internet characters, one blinded by a selfie stick, the other obsessed with being plugged-in and connected.

Actions:
Gathering around public signs. Performing a dance to the ancient Egyptian god of dance and war, Bes. Raising one leg after the other. Releasing anger through laughter.

Close Ups: Here the focus is on how faces, mouths, eyes, and other body parts render visible or demonstrate the traits of each Character. For example, *The Angry's* hand betrays the amount of nervousness and tension building up in the enclosed space between her palm and fingers prior to her vocal outburst. Stills from tests with Jessica van Rüschen and Sahra Huby exploring movements and interactions for *The Angry*.

37 The theme of the festival, *Verbeelding aan de macht*, referred to a slogan that adorned the walls of Paris in May 1968: "Power to imagination."

Character 13: *The Disguised (Elk-Gilles-Domino-Collective consciousness)*

Several *Gilles* marching at the Carnival of Binche, 2017

This character draws inspiration from folklore and festivities, during which people lose their everyday individuality through the use of masks and costumes. In cases such as the *Gilles* at the Carnival of Binche, Belgium, and the *Dominoes* at Patras Carnival, Greece, masks and covering up are used in order for individuals to become anonymous and merge in a common activity, a state of collective consciousness which has the potential to empower participants to find their own voices and claim their freedom. In the case of the (female-only) *Dominoes* in Patras, this masking and covering encouraged sexual freedom, whereas the *Gilles* in the Carnival of Binche aim at an impressive simultaneous appearance, a statement and act of collective power.

Film reference:
Des hommes, des masques, une ville, Alexandre Keresztessy, Belgium, 1978 (57 min). Sound and rhythm invite everyone to plunge into a collective moment. Many drums play together. Many people wear the same mask. It's all about synchronicity. Close-ups: Feet move together, wearing the same shoes.

Megera (Collective Female Consciousness)

Megera/Shila is a hybrid Character combining two roles: She is a Museum Selfie-Junkie and, as *MEGERA (Collective consciousness of silenced female voices)*, she is the Leader of *The Disguised*.

The Meta-Characters

The four *Meta-Characters* belong to a category separate from that of the other characters in the parade. This is articulated in the ways in which they enter into the text and/or parade. What differentiates the four *Meta-Characters* from the other characters is that they do not simply act — they also consider the effects of their own actions.

Character 22: *The Ghost*

A *deus ex machina, The Ghost* appears in order to expose an unjust situation that needs to be addressed through a basic gesture: uncovering. Making reference to the fact that columns in ancient Rome were signifiers of public streets (Champfleury 1867, 90), the *Ghost* stands naked on a pillar, balancing on one foot behind contemporary Brussels public signage, the other foot in the air, haunting our collective consciousness of citizenship rights and public and private space. *The Ghost* embodies knowledge of parrhesiastic characters of the past, referring to and elaborating on examples of parades in art history, such as Ensor's *Christ's Entry into Brussels*, depicting Christ entering contemporary Brussels in a Mardi Gras parade (1889), etchings and paintings by Otto Dix, Picasso's costumes for the ballet *Parade* and its painted theater curtain (1917), Fernard Léger's *La grande parade sur fond rouge* (1953), and Georges Rouault's *Parade* (1907–10).

> *I cannot be seen and I can barely be heard, because I am a Ghost. But I can be felt, when I pass through you. I speak to you through the space, through movement and touch. I whisper in your ears, I make you shiver. I am there to remind you that something wrong happened on the very ground you are stepping on, be it the Villa Empain or the Palace of Justice in Brussels, or the Agora in Athens.... I am the parrhesiastic conscience in everybody's brain. I was behind Diogenes when he walked around the city making cynical jokes to wake up his fellow citizens….*

The Ghost is hosted by locations, events, and spaces related to key moments in the history of the European Union, focusing mainly on Brussels, and additionally on Athens and Maastricht. *The Ghost* traverses the text and does not stay confined within the space allocated to each Character's description.

Character 23: *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words*

Wikken en wegen (BE) = Weigh your words

The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words is a parade within the parade. It develops through the writing process, enriching the description. It moves through the parade of Characters and demonstrates terms that are relevant to both parrhesiastic practices of the past and critical artistic practices of the present.

As a theatrical figure, *The Glossary* moves along the urban tissue of the city, demonstrating the heaviness of words she carries with her, metal words hanging from leather strips around her body. She carries a balance to weigh the words against internet information; she might demonstrate, for example, that in Donald Trump's America "truth" has no weight and ethics are negotiable. The Greek phrase "weightless speech" can be interpreted as meaning speech without value or validity — meaningless, unimportant, unreliable. *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words* is made of words that take up courageous parrhesiastic meanings. The words are made of hammered metal, in reference to value systems and old Greek vows.

As a character and as part of my method, *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words* clarifies certain terms and/or personal definitions, while operating in the space between imagining and actualizing parrhesia, a space in constant movement and flux. "The Short Dictionary of Misunderstood Words" in Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) is my source of inspiration for this *Glossary*. Kundera's dictionary — the third chapter of the book's third part, "Words Misunderstood" — demonstrates how words act as a distancing tool for the two lovers, Sabina and Frantz, due to their radically different cultural upbringings, having been raised in Czechoslovakia and France respectively.

Character 24: *The Academic/Philosopher*

Speaking with a rational-sounding voice, The *Academic/Philosopher* invites passersby, the other Characters, his peers, to a game: *Truth or Dare*. You have to either tell the truth or be dared to do something. This is the difference between Socrates and Diogenes: there is some daring in finding and saying the truth, but there also is some truth in doing things. What is the medium of real truth-finding — saying or doing? *Truth or Dare* connects to this philosophical problem as well as to play. It resonates with the kind of parrhesiastic practices I refer to in my research and seek to re-actualize. The game in itself is a kind of parrhesiastic act — challenging people, forcing us to come out, to show ourselves.

Character 25: *The Engaged Artist*

This category includes a group of Characters such as *Great Appropriators, Impersonators, Image Disruptors*, and *The Ones Who Exercise Spectacular Travesty* — an indicative rather than exhaustive list. They are all artist-parrhesiasts, and I elaborate on seven of them in Chapter II. All these characters simultaneously operate as the parade's masters of ceremonies, and as a result come into conflict with each other. *The Engaged Artist* speaks in a sentimental, expressive voice. For a detailed description of the artist-parrhesiast, see the conclusion of Chapter Two (pages 47–49).

The Narrator's Role

> *Out on the edges is where the assemblage artist works, fooling up, mixing up, raising problems.* (Lawrence Alloway quoted in Shattuck 1992, 140)

How do I, Eleni, speak in this parade? What is my role? I think of Diegesis and imagination. As *Narrator*, I am always there, clear about my methods and goals. I embody the four Meta-Characters (*The Ghost, The Glossary, The Academic*, and *The Engaged Artist*). I-we speak in four distinct voices and carry props for all four Meta-Characters.

- *The Ghost* reflects on historical situations and mediums and parrhesia. *The Ghost* is the imagination and the historical dimension of this text. Whispering voice.
- *The Glossary of Parrhesiastic Words* reflects on the meaning of words in parrhesia. Mechanical voice.
- *The Academic/Philosopher* reflects on the philosophical dimensions of parrhesia. Rational, thoughtful voice.
- *The Engaged Artist* reflects on the spectator's role in parrhesia. Sentimental, expressive voice.

The Narrator/Engaged Artist wants to relate to and communicate with others on multiple levels. Her art practice, which engages performative strategies, serves as a starting point and framework for the project. She chose the parade and she chose to think about parrhesia via several characters, instead of developing one (her own) individual way of enacting parrhesia. Through them she re-assembles herself, she lets herself be played out by others. *The Narrator* alternates between the "I" and the "third person," between immersing herself in the project and retaining a critical distance, seeing herself acting. In doing so, she follows the traces of Charlotte Salomon, and becomes "a strangely twin-natured creature that watches itself acting" (Meyer 2016, 26), but for very different purposes: *The Narrator* attempts to "bear being the impossible-possible witness" (Meyer 2016, 31) of a PhD in and through art experience.

How to Create a Common Process that Enables Parrhesia to Take Place?

PERFORMATIVITY*
SPACE ◄-------- experience / agency / affect* --------► TIME
THEATRICALITY

Appropriating Theatrical Tools

The Narrator introduces theatrical tools in her visual artistic practice: characters, voices, props, and so on. In addition to in the discussion about the notion of theatricality between Bart Verschaffel Klaas Tindemans, Lieven de Cauter, and Paul Vandenbroeck in 1989 TV program *Container*, she is inspired by the curatorial approach and related texts of German curator and director of CCA Singapore, Ute Meta Bauer. Bauer argues in favor of theatricality's potential for critical artistic practices, as it "instigates reflection on how we experience reality in art and how fiction unfolds in reality," but also "provides us with a tool to interfere in what determines reality rather than accept as a given that things cannot be changed" (Bauer 2016, 20). In bringing theatricality into her practice as a critical strategy, *The Narrator* also considers artist, filmmaker, and author Constanze Ruhm's understanding of theatricality as a "migratory form" that moves out of the institution (theater) and onwards into other possible spaces, genres, media, and methodologies (Bauer 2016, 140).



Engaging performative strategies

How can one rehearse, try out, put parrhesia to the test through an artistic, performative framework? I decided to actively explore it through a collaborative development approach. Instead of a hierarchical approach in commissioning other people, I wanted to test methods and limits of co-operation and co-authorship. This would happen in three stages:

Stage 1. Meetings with practitioners (artists, performers, theorists and anthropologists) who share a common language, but not the same cultures to discuss, share opinions and methodologies regarding dialectical confrontations. How do they explore and deal with such issues in their own practices?

Stage 2. Experimentation with practitioners (certain artists and performers from stage 1). Collaboratively build "characters" with them using drawings, objects, and designs from my broader research, and work with texts, sketches and jokes commissioned from Pieter de Buysser (BE), Margo van de Linde (NL), Joep Vossebeld (NL), and Dimitris Dimopoulos (GR) on community-related concepts that lead to heated discussions, more specifically the seven concepts of *Democracy, Prosperity, Solidarity, Language, Migration, Pluralism,* and *Europe*.[38] The tools discovered in stage 1, together

38 These are the themes used by BeLvue Museum, Brussels, to help the visitor discover Belgium. I visited the museum's collection in August 2017.

with the characters and commissioned texts, would be used to express opinions more freely and playfully. How can we work with the limits of language to speak with, against, and through the other?

Stage 3. The tryouts of stage 2 would be recorded and then serve as a basic grid of working methods and tools for future performative events.

How do parrhesiastic practices take place through the characters and their interactions?

Action-Image

In 2017 I collaborated with dancer Sahra Huby in an exploration of how people react to exaggerated movements and expressions from certain users of public space. For example, we became inspired by tourists taking selfies in Grand Place, Brussels, who were so absorbed by the task of placing themselves in the middle of their picture frames that they appeared to totally ignore the space and passersby around them. People responded to Sahra's try-outs in various ways, ranging from friendly, joking, flirty, indifferent, and mostly wanting to become part of her selfie shot. Six months later I invited more people to participate in this game: myself and Sahra Huby, dancer Jessica van Rüschen, and DOP Boris van Hoof experimented with the Characters' movements in urban public spaces in Brussels and observed people's reactions. Champfleury's books on the history of caricature and books on caricature in Belgium were used as references. In working towards an expanded version of parrhesia that goes beyond verbalization, bodily movements and gestures such as breathing, moving, standing still — activities proposed by Judith Butler as potential forms of "political performativity" (Butler 2015, 18) — were taken into consideration: the Characters move, communicate, and interact through their voices, bodies, and exaggerated gestures. The selection of spaces was dictated by the Characters and their actions; Gallery Bortier, an arcade of antique bookshops, would be a suitable space in which *The Collectors of Proverbs* could rehearse, for example, and the Marolles (see image on page 138) where the film *La Bataille des Marolles* (see Character 10 in Appendix 1) was shot, would be relevant for collective actions.

In public space, the Characters interact among themselves, but also with an external, accidental audience. To give a few examples:

Joep, as *The One that Brings the World Upside Down*, Margo, as *The Animal-Horse*, and Shila, as *Megera*, are sitting next to each other on a bench on one of the platforms of Maastricht train station. The trains come and go while they tell each other populist jokes about Europe:

MARGO-THE ANIMAL-HORSE

Europa is net een seksclub: niemand die lid is durft er thuis over te vertellen.

JOEP-THE ONE THAT BRINGS
THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

Europa is net de Melkweg: licht van allang gedoofde sterren.

SHILA-MEGERA

Europa is als een Hollands verjaardagsfeestje: veel gezeur en weinig sfeer.

JOEP-THE ONE THAT BRINGS
THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

Europa is als theater: het drama begint in Griekenland.

Europa is als een oude lerares: alleen de Franse president raakt er opgewonden van.

Europa is als Britney Spears: populair in de jaren 90, nu vooral treurig.

Three *Collectors of Proverbs* parade along the public Library of Centre Ceramique in Maastricht late on a Sunday afternoon, holding seven placards on which are written seven community-related concepts likely to create disagreement.[39] *The Collectors of Proverbs* exit Centre Ceramique. They march along Plein 1992, while a voiceover in Greek by Dimitris Dimopoulos and Lina Kalpazidou demonstrates proverbs in various European languages. *The Collectors of Proverbs* approach passersby and ask for proverbs in any language on the seven topics, which they then write down in a reporter's notebook.

Some of the Characters enter the Carnival parade of Maastricht. Joining the parade, Megera is now out in the streets. *The Animal-Horse* also joins, surrounded by other parade horses.

39 See footnote 38.

Eleni/*The Narrator* holds a 3D-printed half-head self-portrait. She stands beside the parade, watching masked participants and chariots passing by.

Between Directed and Delegated Performance*

The Healers rehearse a healing dance for the public space at Place du Jeu de Balle or Vossenplein, a square located in the heart of the Marolles/Marollen, Brussels.

In 2018, I had the opportunity to collaborate with three performers (Shila Anaraki, Tarek Halaby, and Gaetan Bulourde) on filmic tests in public space. We developed a game-playing method that is non-hierarchical and inclusive. For this we worked together by democratically sharing the filming time and each proposing our own visions on specific commissioned texts/jokes. We made one filmic proposition each and divided the shooting time into four equal slices, four being the number of main participants: three performers and myself. Humor, masquerade (playing a character, acting out another background or opinion), and dialogue are the tools that we used in the experiment.

I often appropriate* notions and insights from other fields of knowledge that help me develop my methods in my own research. In developing my appropriation strategies, I take into consideration social anthropologist Arnd Schneider's suggestion of re-evaluating appropriation as a hermeneutic practice, "an act of dialogical understanding" (Schneider 2006, 36).

By inviting Shila, Tarek, and Gaetan to enter into my research process and use elements of my research material (characters, histories, locations, and commissioned texts) as tools, I encouraged them to appropriate and transform my findings. By inviting people to suggest ways of working, take up the space, and contradict me and each other, I put myself in a vulnerable position, dependent on their input. Between directed and delegated performance, a space opens up that cannot be controlled and that keeps transforming — a parrhesiastic space. If you are a true parrhesiast then you work with delegated performance. An example: four approaches on Dimitri Dimopoulos's joke: Languages (see Appendix 2, pages 204–205).

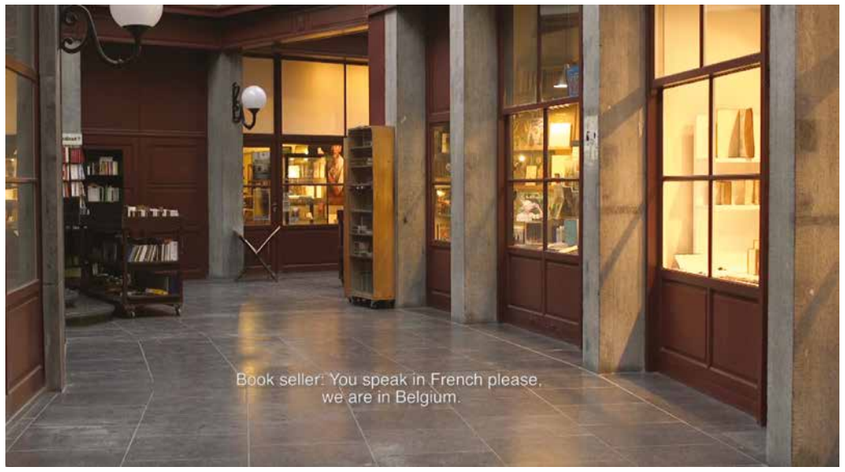
From left to right, top to bottom: Shila, Gaetan, Tarek, and Margo as The One Whose Words Penetrate Brains invite passersby to connect with them in a full and then empty Place du Jeu De Balle, Brussels (first and second photo), Grand Place, Brussels (third photo), and Het Vrijhtof, Maastricht (fourth photo).

Ongoing Rehearsal*

Throughout my PhD research, my practice has been situated within "processes of rehearsal and staging in contemporary arts discourse," in line with artists, curators, and theoreticians who consider rehearsal as a "counter-model" of practice, one that allows for reflecting on and re-interpreting existing rules and formats (Buchman, Lafer & Ruhm 2016, 12).

The concept of an ongoing rehearsal* is central to my research and practice. Throughout this PhD research process my rehearsals of parhesiastic theater alternate between meletan and gymnazein. Foucault traces the differences between these ancient Greek terms as follows: "*gymnazein* generally designates more a sort of test 'in real life', a way of confronting the thing, as you confront an adversary, in order to find out if you can resist him or be the stronger, whereas the *meletan* is a sort of mental exercise, rather, an exercise 'in thought', but which again is quite different from what we understand by meditation" and "*meletan*, the exercise of thought often supported by a text which one reads; then *graphein*, writing" (Foucault 2005, 18). I have been alternating between meletan (through learning, reading, collecting information, and writing *on* parrhesia) and gymnazein (training to articulate *my own* parrhesia, taking the risk of being exposed in and through my artistic practice).

Repetition and rehearsal for film or theater are of vital importance for this project. I consider them to be structuring elements. Throughout the parade, the circulatory processes of communication, dialogue, and listening are constantly rehearsed, executed, and put to the test. Taking as a point of departure the various commissioned jokes, the performers rehearse using improvisation, a performative strategy that permits play to come in.



In one of our rehearsals, *Casting Call #18, The Collectors of Proverbs* — shot in Gallery Bortier, a public space in Brussels hosting antique bookstores — the camera captures two female performers warming up, trying out the *Collector*'s walk, while repeating in English, French, and German the words *Democracy, Prosperity, Solidarity, Language, Pluralism,* and *Europe*. During the third video rehearsal, an unexpectedly aggressive linguistic response from a bookseller takes place. In her effort to protect her property — her books — the bookseller's language quickly descended to nationalistic clichés regarding territory, language, and identity. The sound of performers rehearsing and uttering the words *Europe, Language,* and *Solidarity* in English and German, heard across the narrow public passage of the gallery in front of her bookshop, likely triggered her verbal outburst.

Tensions between an inside and an outside are inherent to both the notion of parrhesia and the processes of comedy, jokes, and laughter*. The notion of the limit is inextricably linked to my research subject; parrhesia is examined through a variety of characters who have the tendency to play on the borders of what is "correct." In exercising parrhesia, the *Drunk*, the *Animal*, the *Fool*, and the others often surpass the limits of politically correct behavior. They offend, they provoke, they challenge the limits of normality. Where is the limit of a joke? In considering rehearsal as the actual "work," I combine the freedom to experiment with several formats and test the parameters employed in the project through the rehearsal's potential as a tool for retrospection, enabling critical reflection and reevaluation of one's experiments.

A Common Act of Witnessing in Rehearsing for a Parrhesiastic Theater Parade

The role of audience participation is vital for a parade that advocates inclusivity and within which everyone is welcome to speak up. How can I do the hosting in a way that allows people to find their place in this series of attempts, events, and manifestations? In considering examples of socially oriented reception within contemporary artistic production, I was often disappointed by art that functioned impeccably within the aesthetic realm — smart, safe comments that made perfect sense in the art world, but that did not take the risk to critically interrogate how such comments impacted their site of production.

The practices of the artists associated with "relational aesthetics," a term introduced by French art historian, curator, and critic Nicolas Bourriaud in 1996, were informed by movements known for their avant-garde and participatory aspects, such as Fluxus, Dada, and Situationism. Relational art considers social interaction as the actual work. The production of a social space is specifically positioned in relation to the notion of "conviviality": eating a soup together in an opening, parading, celebrating, and so on. Although Bourriaud contributed interesting insights regarding conditions of artistic production in the 1990s, it has been pointed out that under relational aesthetics conviviality served as a reconfirmation of the system (here, the art market) and the status quo within which it operated. US artist and educator Joe Scanlan thus read it as "peer pressure," which, he said "would suggest that one of the best ways to control human behavior is to practice relational aesthetics" (Scanlan 2005). In her essay "Relational Art and Antagonism," art historian and critic Claire Bishop brings in Hal Foster's text from 1996, pointing out that "the institution may shadow the work that it otherwise highlights: it becomes the spectacle, it collects the cultural capital and the director-curator becomes the star" (Foster 1996, 198), to stress the issue of the conflict of interests in situations such as Bourriaud's, being at the same time the co-director of Palais de Tokyo and the theorist of the movement (Bishop 2004, 53). Furthermore, Bishop expresses

skepticism about several aspects of relational aesthetics: she considers the gatherings produced in its context too homogeneous and consensual to be democratic, and deconstructs many of Bourriaud's claims by asking questions to positions she finds unclear: "If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what *types* of relations are being produced, for whom and why?" (Bishop 2004, 65).

What is needed to create a shared experience within an art context? In his book *Reassembling the Social*, French philosopher, anthropologist, and sociologist Bruno Latour argues that the elusiveness of the term "social ties" is due to the fact that:

> the adjective "social" designates two entirely different phenomena: it's at once a substance, a kind of stuff, and also a movement between non-social elements. In both cases, the social vanishes. When it is taken as a solid, it loses its ability to associate; when it's taken as a fluid, the social again disappears because it flashes only briefly, just at the fleeting moment when new associations are sticking the collective together. It's traceable only when it's being modified. Physiologists have shown that for a perception to take place, continuous movements and adjustments are necessary: no movement, no feeling. This is true for the senses of sight and hearing as well as for taste, smell, and touch. ...With the absence of movements has come a blurring of the senses. The same is true of the "sense of the social": no new association, no way to feel the grasp. (Latour 2007, 159).

In recent years I have often experienced feelings of emptiness and fatigue while participating in "activist" political, artistic, and/or curatorial statements. I found myself often wondering about the limits between artistic practices and activism, between art and ethics. I suggest there is something worth considering in loosely following a line of thought from Peter Bürger's historical typology sketch of individual versus collective reception in sacred, courtly, and bourgeois art (Bishop 2006, 46–47), to US philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer John Dewey's emphasis on the role of the process for the development of an "experience." Dewey was critical of distancing art from society, placing it on a pedestal, apart from the experiences of everyday life, as a result of a capitalist way of thinking (Dewey 1934, Chap. 1). Inspired by Dewey's writings, US artist Allan Kaprow responded by proposing new forms, namely *Assemblages, Environments & Happenings*, as his 1966 book is titled. All three forms suggest a blurring between art and life — life, art, form — in the 1960s and 1970s. The 1960s brought in a participatory impulse, with artistic practices "appropriating social forms as a way to bring art closer to everyday life" (Bishop 2006, 10).

Fifty years later, Bishop identified certain theoretical reference points for participatory and collaborative art in her 2012 book *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. She discussed certain changes in theory in the 1990s that influenced "the discourse around participatory art," relating how British philosopher Peter Dews claimed that the comeback or revitalization of "questions of conscience and obligation, of recognition and respect, of justice and law" was an "ethical turn" — an idea that thinkers such as Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and Jacques Rancière have opposed, as they remain "skeptical of the jargon of human rights and identitarian politics" (Bishop 2012, 25).

When asking "how to engage the audience, how to engage the beholder, how to make him part of the scene" — as Austrian art historian and art critic Sabeth Buchmann beautifully put it in a January 2018 presentation in Amsterdam — a space open for imagination is a precondition (Buchmann 2018). Buchmann describes the kind of space that opens up in the late-19th-century paintings that Edgar Degas made of ballet rehearsals:

> it is a kind of a scene without a beginning and without an end. It is an empty middle space and it is exactly the space where you as a beholder or as the audience step in. It is a space of imagination, it is not filled. It is open, and I think that is constitutive for processes of rehearsal and Degas made hundreds of them […] You always have this kind of circular moment, this circular causal method (Buchmann 2018).

From a new media and film studies perspective, US film theorist Robert Stam includes and reflects on "witnessing publics," a term coined by filmmaker and anthropologist Meg McLagan. Witnessing publics are "that loose collection of individuals, constituted by and through the media, acting as observers of injustices that might otherwise go unreported or unanswered" (Stam 2015, 281). However different the mediums may be, the converging point seems to be a link between acting as a witness and feeling involved in a common process. Buchmann concludes by describing her experience of the painting of a rehearsal by Degas as follows:

> to the degree you can see that the Maître de ballet is looking at the scene, which is in the making, it is not finished, to the degree you can imagine also the beholder of the painting as someone who is not only contemplating about the scene, but who is judging, who is evaluating. There is something more about the concept of perception and the concept of the receiver and the beholder. There is something that tries to tell you, you are part of common process of judgment and evaluation (Buchmann 2018).

For the purposes of the parade, I opened up the rehearsals to various possibilities of participation, from paid professionals to an invited audience, amateurs, an accidental audience, and volunteers, in an attempt to undermine the boundaries between spectator, participant, and performer. In this body of tests, experiments, and try-outs, the different agents and agencies blend together. The approach is strongly inspired by German writer, poet, psychoanalyst, and Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck: "Let it run until it happens: this is in my opinion the slogan, or should be the slogan, of the assemblers" (Shattuck 1992, 135). In the rehearsals for the parade, performers, professionals, amateurs, volunteers, and an accidental audience partake in a witnessing act from different angles, and are encouraged to respond by enacting parrhesia. In this series of attempts, events, and manifestations, each rehearsal "runs" or activates people until we become a community of laughers, both witnesses and participants, through the common experience of laughing at others and ourselves through performance and film.

Case Study: RE-M-OMMEGANG (RE-M-WALK AROUND)

RE-M-OMMEGANG is a 30-minute performance produced by Playground Festival, which premiered on November 16, 2018, at Museum-M, Leuven and was also presented on November 17 and 18. Between the physical and the online, Shila Anaraki performs in the medieval section of the Museum-M collection in Leuven. There are spectators all around her. She attempts a curated walk, more specifically a re-m-ommegang, a "re-Museum M-walk-around," speculating on the perspective of an item in the museum's medieval collection. Shila is a ***Museum Selfie-Junkie*** and carries a reproduction of the head of female giant *Megera*, a medieval character of the city of Leuven and the only remaining part of Leuven's fifteenth-century Ommegang.[40] Shila puts on and takes off the reproduction of the giant *Megera* head while trying to film herself with her phone. Shila's *Megera* stands for the internal female voice that

40 Leuven's ommegang was a religious procession held annually in honor of the city's patron, the Blessed Virgin Mary, between the 14th century and 1681. See: https://www.erfgoedcelleuven.be/nl/reuzenhoofd-megera.

is not audible to others. Inviting the audience to join her in the parade, the performer activates the collection's items and the space around her by talking, holding the phone on a selfie-stick, and moving along with it in a game of postures and gestures. She leads the group of ***The Disguised*** *(Collective Consciousness of Silenced Female Voices)*.

SHILA is a ***Selfie-Junkie*** and the ***Broadcaster/Master of Ceremonies***. She possesses the ability to speak in three voices: *factual* (dry knowledge, the canon, the figures the museum and art history give us), *casual/personal* (the relationship Shila creates with the audience, the relational), *and fictional* (real knowledge, reality not represented, other ways of speaking, poetic exercises).

Following my personal research into items within the Museum-M collection and into specifically *Megera*'s giant head and her history, Shila and I entered into an ongoing ping-pong of ideas. Over several months, we persistently tested whether each new building block we added to the performance was strong enough to "hold" the audience, focusing on "holding" as a concept. Building the script and developing the performance together was a risky, challenging, wonderful process of building together trust, while carrying around the frozen frame of *Megera*.

SHILA/MEGERA

> Christ! I have always been silent! My actual name was Megara. Megera is the corrupted version. In Greek Megera means a bitch. Well, so be it, why not? I wish I could be a nice bitch. Anyhow, I am the only remaining part of the Omnegang. I have no body. I have nobody. So how do I move? It seems I need somebody else's body in order to move...

She tries to coordinate her senses. She takes off the mask and interrupts:

SHILA/MEGERA

> The system was as follows; both Megera and her monkey were sitting on the horse. The horse was a giant wooden construction, carried from the inside by eight strong men. The carriers were able to move the head of Megera and the monkey, with the help of a string. To not forget: as Megera was a giant, the carriers had to make a big effort in order to move her. To those of us that are here present, I propose: Let's now join our forces and make a huge effort to bring Megera out to the streets where she belongs.

The audience walks backwards in the museum assuming a form of parade.

At the end of the performance, the communal body of the audience collectively carried paper fragments and leftovers of printed images of *Megera* back to the beginning of the walk-around. Walking backwards, they handed over their sense of control to Shila, the broadcaster, having come to trust in her through her storytelling. I ask myself, did this work really have to do with parrhesia? Yes and no. It did in the sense that we invented a story in order to revisit the collection and give *Megera* a voice. Fiction and facts came together to create an attractive environment and seduce the audience into engaging with the museum's history. This ostensible guided tour made it possible for us to comment upon the museum's role in the history of voiceless women and to explore the space in which we, contemporary beholders and audience members, operate between actual presence and the online and what we trust as real. *RE-M-OMMEGANG* communicated better among younger audiences, who took the iPad along as a contemporary relic to watch the performance.

Each of my rehearsals engages with a specific place, time, and a character's possible actions in that setting. Megera was not one of the Characters I invented, but a new one I found in Museum-M, which joined the parade after being picked up by the *Museum-Selfie Junkie*. *RE-M-OMMEGANG* took place between Shila, *Megera*, and her reproductions, between Shila's performance in the actual museum space and its live transmission to a virtual space via the mobile phone, addressing three audiences — live, online, and future. Through these multiple formats — performance, live-streamed event, and video documentation — *RE-M-OMMEGANG* extends in time and space from the here and now for a live audience, to a recording for the future beholder. A rehearsal for building trust among different audiences in the common process of joining a parade.

Case study: Affection-Image.
Deep Listening for Character 18: The (Wounded) Healer

Having been selected through an open call, *The Narrator* was as an artist-in-residence in Varberg, a small town of 20,000 inhabitants, from April 29 to June 8, 2019. The town is a famous spa resort in southwestern Sweden. The residency's theme was *Self-Care Then and Now in Varberg*.

What brought her to Varberg were questions about the conditions under which self-care can take place. Her goal was to realize a short artist's film documenting a discussion between several participants, to be filmed in the spaces of care. She would organize and make a film, a flowing conversation in the water, reflecting upon the activity of self-care in the floating environment within which it takes place. How does time count in self-care? How does it affect us both on an individual basis and in forming a community? Throughout the Art Inside Out residency she would develop Character 18, *The Healer/Caretaker*.

This Character is inspired by activists such as Louise Dunlap, author of the book *Undoing the Silence: Six Tools for Social Change Writing* (2007), but also other practitioners, such as author, political journalist, world peace advocate, and inner healer Norman Cousins and his book *Anatomy of an Illness: As Perceived by the Patient* (1979). How would the *Healer* — as an individual — take care of herself in Varberg's Kallbadhuset, or cold bathhouse, a building-witness of collective self-care?

The first two weeks of the residency were dedicated to research: an intense program of discussions with several individuals, organizations, and local guides offered input and a diversity of perspectives on the notion of self-care in Sweden.[41] These conversations were recorded. *The Narrator* found the paradoxes and twists embedded in the history of the Swedish healthcare system fascinating. On the one hand, the system demonstrates commitment to innovative ways of working with various social groups, an impressive desire for inclusivity, and an urge to fulfil democratic ideals through healthcare. On the other hand, she was puzzled to find that several interviewees and participants in the discussions described the healthcare system as a rigid, inflexible structure, within which one either fits or does not. She decided to address these issues by developing a mini-dramaturgy for the *Healer/Caretaker*.

In order to develop this Character during the residency, *The Narrator* practiced intensive listening: she dedicated her time to transcribing the interviews and discussions with local participants as well as selected archival material. What she did was listen, record, and transcribe. A mechanical process. In such a repetitive activity, one forgets one's ego, which may leave space for being useful to others and allow for healing processes to enter the frame. In his essay "The Aesthetics of Affect," Simon O'Sullivan refers to Jean-François Lyotard's call "for a practice of patience, of listening — a kind of meditative state that allows for, produces an opening for, an experience of the event, precisely, as the affect" (O'Sullivan 2001, 128).

By transcribing and listening again and again to several of the discussions, she created the film's script. The film takes place in the Kallbadhuset. The camera follows Tarek, a dancer practicing self-care in the spaces of the cold bathhouse: the cabins, the sauna, the showers, the sea. The dancer explores the notion of self-care through his body. In between the sounds of the sea and the wind, female voices from the archives re-inhabit the women's sauna. They alternate with the female archivist's voiceover and local voices offering historical facts on Kallbadhuset and *the Healer*'s voiceover. *The Healer* (Tarek) addresses the local participants by assembling their own spoken phrases, sentences, and words on healthcare:

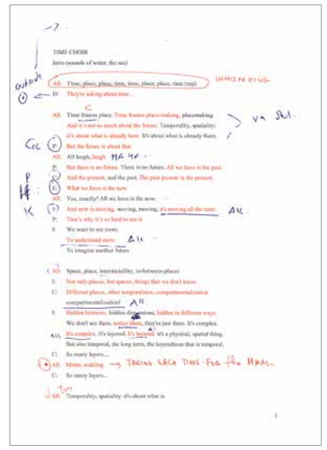
> If I would enter into insanity somehow, I would need to go to the public health care system. But the problem is in Sweden that you still need to be coping with the system. You still need to be sane enough to know how to cope with the system.
>
> And it could be hard for me to talk. Because I had been through so many treatments, where I should talk about everything and the words, it was so hard to find meaningful words, but I could have expressed it in other ways, through dancing and singing. It was really a way of self-care for me. And it was…

41 These included, among (many) others: dance developers Hugo Tham and Anna Leppäjoki, who respectively specialize in dance for patients of Parkinson's disease and girls suffering anxiety during puberty; mime Ika Nord, who currently works with amateurs; lecturer Ingrid Martins Holmberg and architect Henric Benesch; psychologist Elizabeth Puzzi from research group Curating the City; the Centre for Critical Heritage Studies; UGOT Gothenburg University; and the members of the Art Inside Out team — editor Petra Johansson, producer Davor Abazovic, process leader Cecilia Gelin, and artist and local guide Krystallia Sakelariou.

In this way, the bathhouse's moving images are activated through the acoustic mirror that *the Healer* holds back toward the audience. Together they invite the spectator to reflect and position herself within this environment in turn.

In his chapter "Supplement II: Keywords for Affect," Canadian philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi includes the word "belonging," which he relates to affect as follows: "In affect, we are never alone. That's because affects in Spinoza's definition are basically ways of connecting, to others and to other situations, of affecting and being affected. They are our angle of participation in processes larger than ourselves. With intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life — a heightened sense of belonging, with other people and to other places" (Massumi 2014, 110).

By transcribing and listening again and again to several of the discussions, *The Narrator* noticed how much emphasis and concern is placed on the notion of time, on how we think of the past in relation to the future. This time she collected only those phrases, sentences, and words spoken by members of the Art Inside Out team — Petra, Davor, Cecilia, and Krystallia — and by Hugo, Elizabeth Ingrid, Henrik, and herself, which were relevant to the question of time. How does time count in self-care? How does it affect us both on an individual basis and in forming a community? Together with Dutch writer and poet Tina Van Baren she reshuffled, edited, rearranged, and reconfigured those phrases, sentences, and words, by thinking of how much breathing space is needed between them, in order for the text to flow like water.



She decided to treat the reworked text as the starting point for a new game: *Time-Choir*. The rules are simple. Participants are invited to experiment with a collaborative reading of the text. There are as many reading variations as participants, multiplied by the ability of each to articulate and combine their articulations in a collective reading group.

Every attempt to form a choir involves this tension between the vocal expression of individual bodies and the articulation of a collective body that includes those bodies in unison, at the same time. Traditionally, the goal is the production of a harmonic whole. Through the *Time-Choir* game *The Narrator* tried to develop a working method to exercise parrhesia through a democratic process, in which the participants may come in and affect what is being practiced.

The *Time-Choir* group that quite spontaneously and arbitrarily came together on June 3 consisted of seven participants: four members of the Art Inside Out team (Petra, Davor, Cecilia, and Krystallia) who had already been part of the discussions; a politician and member of the Art Inside Out board, Katarina Sundberg; a volunteer, former teacher, and self-taught painter, Margareta Hjortsberg; and audio engineer Helena Persson, who also conducted and recorded the event.

In contrast to the other members of the group, Margareta was initially hesitant to participate. She told *The Narrator*: "I just want to be here and look, like a little mouse." For this game *The Narrator* officially took up the role of a director, but in essence she was there to serve the process, to safeguard the availability of a welcoming space for experimentation through participation. The co-workers found the process extremely amusing. They were surprised to discover different aspects of their fellow co-workers. After the first try-out, Margareta joined the choir and actively took part as one of the voices throughout the whole afternoon of reading and audio registrations.

In their transformative processes, parrhesiastic practices entail caring and healing, therapeutic qualities. Foucault draws attention to this very close relation between curing and caring in Socrates' parrhesiastic approach. This is evident in Socrates' wealthy friend Crito, who "was cured when in discussion with Socrates, he had been freed from the common opinion, from the opinion of corrupting souls, in order, on the contrary, to choose, resolve and make up his mind through opinion founded on the relation of self to the truth" (Foucault 2011, 105–6). These qualities are also evident in Demonax as described by Lucian: the Cynic as a figure "for whom the practice of truth is a mild, curative, therapeutic practice, a practice of peace and not of insults and assaults" (Foucault 2011, 199).

In "Keywords for Affect," Massumi defines the time of the "event" as this in-between time or transversal time, during which "there is a reactivation of the past in passage toward a changed future, cutting across dimensions of time, between past and future, and between pasts of different orders" (Massumi 2014, 104). The *Time-Choir* involves a certain use of bodies: the participants may laugh together, nod, take time from their time to come together, literally enact in time what the text says. They are free to negotiate and eventually co-develop the text's rhythm, time, rules, their very own collective understanding of how the piece should be read in time.

Although *Time-Choir* was just a game, participants did risk appearing ridiculous to the eyes of their co-workers or co-participants whom they had only just met. They allowed themselves to experience a certain vulnerability while exposing their own voices during this collective exercise between listening and speaking. In September 2019, the *Time-Choir* audio piece was presented to the public in the Kalldbahuset. A light rain choreographed the positions of the audience. They chose the cabins as the protective coverings under which they could stand and experience the work. This setting intensified the experience: individuals looked at each other while listening as a group to the piece, which asks a community to consider their time together responsibly, but also playfully. The *Time-Choir* group threw a pebble into Varberg's waters of self-care, producing circles of affect.

A few concluding remarks: A recap of the considerations for the composition of the Parade

My Parade draws examples and inspiration from old celebratory Parades filled with laughter and excess. It appropriates strategies and tools for bringing people together, enabling them to "appear" in common view. It does not reenact an old parade, however. My Parade is a mental structure and a device, a parade in the sense of the addition of elements, starting from my drawings and a monological approach, and reaching out to others, who include professionals such as writers, costume makers, puppeteers, and performers but also amateurs, volunteers, and invited and accidental audience members. The Parade builds up and evolves through the augmentation of a heterogeneous collection of texts, characters, props, voices, and people joining, becoming part of it. This happens in a successive manner that investigates and supports both the research and the practice.

The specific characteristics of my Parade have evolved through my focus on old popular European artists and practices. Following my investigation into European appearances of parrhesia through popular entertainment, via museum visits, books, interviews, and collections, I put together an indicative list of parrhesiastic Characters. The Characters in my Parade invoke the voices and figures of Old Parrhesiastic Laughers to activate the contemporary viewer. They are revitalizers of dormant powers within specific localities.

Parades form and address a social body. My Parade is approached as an ongoing rehearsal, practiced in the space between observation and imagination, within which the parrhesiast artist as Cynic operates. In this preparation towards the Parade's event, the Characters are carriers of historical knowledge and invoke collective memory. Massumi reflects on this temporality of transversal time, the time of the event, arguing that "it enables, and requires, you to rethink all of these terms — bodily capacitation, felt transition, quality of lived experience, memory, repetition, seriation, tendency — in dynamic relation to each other" (Massumi 2014, 104). In this transitional social space of the parade, the parrhesiast artist as Cynic keeps asking the question "How can I, as an artist, practice my ability to create a kind of shared sense of what is true or meaningful?" The artist seeks to do this by inviting others to join, bringing together bodies affecting and being affected, making them part of the question.