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## **Taking place: Parrhesiastic Theater as a model for artistic practice**

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## IV. Casting Call



Character: The Disguised

“It is the *documenting* that counts, the project of finding a form that would encompass the material at hand and not just the ‘document’ that may come out of it.” (Lotringer 2016, 101)

It’s late evening in December 2020, in Maastricht. COVID-19 goes on. Lockdown has just been reimposed in the Netherlands. *The Narrator* reads material on the **subject, influences, method, structure, and filmic treatment** of the film *Casting Call* aloud:

In the film project *Casting Call* I bring together four years of investigation into the notion of parrhesia, *the courage to speak one’s mind*, which I approach from a comedic and excessive perspective. It is situated against the backdrop of three cities strongly linked to the European Union: Athens, Brussels and Maastricht. These three cities take center stage in the European political theater of today: the Maastricht Treaty was signed in 1992, Brussels is the de facto European capital, and Athens has been the epicenter of the Greek financial crisis played out since 2010.

The film is intended as a cultural allegory of contemporary Europe, using the notion of parrhesia as *the courage to engage in subversive dialogue*. Its title references the preparation of a film or theater production, but can also be considered an invitation to inclusivity — the act and process of, and a call for, participation.

*Casting Call* employs characters-types, populist jokes, costumes, props, dark allegories and excess to playfully ask serious questions about living well together and the role of public space and time<sup>42</sup> in contemporary Europe. The way in which parrhesia may or may not conquer public space in times of social media and post-truth is the film’s subject.

Listening is of vital importance in *Casting Call* due to its subject matter. A desire to interact in a dialectical game is required for parrhesia to successfully take place: the one who speaks the truth, the parrhesiast, aims at transforming the ethos of the one who listens, who must want to listen. Drawing inspiration from French film theorist and experimental music composer Michel Chion’s celebrated book *The Voice in Cinema* (1999), *Casting Call* focuses attention on both silence and verbal utterance, pauses and addressivity\*.

In *Casting Call* I explore what the courage to speak up might mean in Europe today. The film investigates how confrontation between various characters can arise in the inverted world of a festive European parade. The experience of collectively leading our lives on and off social media has a direct influence on how we speak our minds and therefore on parrhesia’s contemporary role. What about our ability to listen together, and maybe eventually laugh together, in contemporary European public space?

## Inspiration-Influences

My main references and sources of inspiration for this film are: Marguerite Duras' use of repetition and the sound of the voice in space; Gilles Deleuze's notion of the refrain and of repetition as fundamentally different from the logic of representation (repetition against representation); and Danish dramaturg Ulla Ryum's spiral-dramaturgical model, which she developed in the 1960s and 1970s. I am specifically interested in how Ryum's model "seeks associative relationships between images instead of continuity and development. Unlike a linear temporality where a position excludes and displaces the other, Ryum's model instead opens for conflict and thereby invites to a common ethical room with space to accommodate difference and disagreement" (<https://khio.no/events/817>).

I would also like to cite Franco "Bifo" Berardi, according to whom the dominant mode of social interaction is currently shifting from conjunctive to connective — or, in his own words, "from the alphabetical to the digital environment of the Infosphere" (Berardi 2014, 10–11). In examining how aesthetic and emotional sensibilities are affected in the communication process between living and conscious organisms, Berardi remarks that change may take place through conjunction — "singularities can change when they conjoin" — but not in the connective mode, where "each element remains distinct and interacts only functionally" (Berardi 2014, 18).

Film is a time-based medium. In thinking about parrhesia as a concept that is related to acts of not forgetting, I find it important to mention the artist Michelle Dizon, for whom activating memory is "an act of resistance." I encountered her work in Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art 2019. As GIBCA's website explains:

In the installation *The Archive's Fold*, Dizon uses images of the US colonial and postcolonial period in the Philippines, sourced from archives in the Philippines, the USA, her family albums, and the internet — to deal with the intergenerational legacies of colonial violence. The official archival photographs are contrasted with Dizon's personal portrayal of an intimate realm where physical and spiritual remains are shared by the dead, the living, and the unborn. The piece takes the form of a conversation between Dizon's great-great-grandmother in the year 1905 and her grandchild's great-granddaughter in 2123. (GIBCA n.d.)

In his 1991 book *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy*, Greek-French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis argues that "hand-in-hand with the creation of a public space goes the creation of a *public time*." He explains that by public time he means "the emergence of a dimension where the collectivity<sup>43</sup> can inspect its own past as the result of its own actions, and where an indeterminate future opens up as a domain for its activities" (Castoriadis 1991, Chap. 5). By public time, Castoriadis means historiography. His notion of public time resonates with Sara Sharma's conclusion in her book *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*, where in defense of a radical politics of time and space, a "politics for the meantime" as she calls it, she places emphasis on an understanding of "all social space as being in transit" and on the importance of "politicizing how we inhabit time," as "this leads to reimagining time as a collective struggle" (Sharma 2014, 142).

## Method — Matter/It's a Matter of Method

*Casting Call* takes the form of an essay-film in which the interior monologue voiceover of *The Narrator* becomes a central character, leading the viewer along a subjective and reflective path of shot footage. The film's production has an innovative and experimental character, resulting from a singular working method that corresponds closely to its investigated subject matter.

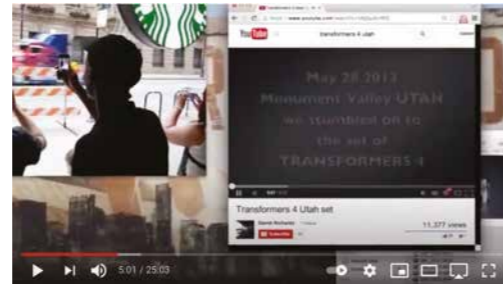
The method was process-oriented and aimed at challenging existing hierarchies and stereotypes about borders between individual and collective thinking. The filming process provided a temporary platform, a niche that offered both invited and casual or unexpected participants the opportunity to come together and express their ideas. To give an example: as I described in Chapter III (pages 80–81), in 2018 three performers and I developed a game-playing method that is non-hierarchical and inclusive. We made one filmic proposition each, based on the same joke, Language by Dimitris Dimopoulos, and divided the shooting time into four equal slices (there being three performers and myself). Each of us conceived of an idiosyncratic version of the joke and its mise en scène and performed it in public space (Scenes 16–17–18). The democratic structure of the filming process led to a platform where parrhesiastic exchange could be practiced. Creating this possibility goes far beyond just representing parrhesia as a subject.

I see *Casting Call* as a genre crossover: it combines documentary methods with testimonies and allegorical performances in public space using jokes and mini-dramaturgies written by screenwriters in their native languages. I used performative strategies to approach the notion and subject matter of parrhesia by opening the filmmaking process to writers, performers, artists, and voluntary and accidental audience members, and engaging them in it.

The need to organize the footage created led me to reconsider the film as both a document of the various authors' texts and proposed scenes of the script *and* as the process of documenting the performative utterances generated between the "I" and the "we" on location.

## Filmic Approach

The film begins with a monologue from a performer (*The Narrator*) in an interior space improvising her part in *Casting Call*'s script. The camera captures her introducing and grouping the building blocks of *Casting Call* (drawings of characters, photos of Bellevue Museum, jokes and their performative tryouts in public space) on her desktop computer. Occasionally the camera captures only what happens on the computer's screen, following the logic of a desktop film or documentary, a sub-genre of desktop film that "uses screen capture technology to treat the computer screen as both a camera lens and a canvas."<sup>44</sup> Here I provide a few examples of desktop films as inspiration:



Kevin B. Lee Transformers: The Premake



Patricia Esquivias '111-119 Generalísimo/Castellana' (2012) Desktop as storyboard: Lena Berg, False Belief (2019)

In the film, the making process, playful moments (jokes in public spaces,<sup>45</sup> surreal elements) and reflective moments (discourse)<sup>46</sup> are interweaved through the narrator who connects the scenes and brings these elements together. She does this through improvising or rehearsing in four very different tones of voice.

*The Narrator's* tone of voice alternates according to the four narrating roles she assumes (*The Ghost*/whispering voice, *The Glossary*/mechanical voice, *The Philosopher*/rational and thoughtful voice, and *The Engaged Artist*/sentimental and expressive voice). This particular mode of narration is used because these four perspectives are indispensable for understanding parrhesia, which is equally a historical notion, a verbal activity, a philosophical term, and a socially engaged practice.

The spectator is often led from one shooting location to another through *The Narrator's* voices, movements, and the sounds of props that accompany each voice. These vary from an invisible, whispering voiceover (*The Ghost*) to specific movements and the sounds of one of the props belonging to one of the voices (metal words for *The Glossary*, a suitcase with celluloid film for *The Engaged Artist* and *The Philosopher*).

Gradually the film develops into a surrealistic, dystopian world of twisted and transformed characters. In this simultaneously funny and cruel, visually attractive and weird landscape, puppets and humans co-exist, speaking their minds through masks and cruel jokes. This development happens in an unorthodox parade of sequences of parrhesiastic attempts and manifestations.

<sup>45</sup> These are treated as short autonomous mises-en-scenes in public space, based on the commissioned jokes. Interactions between performers-characters and passersby (an accidental audience) take place. The resulting encounters range from funny to awkward to unpredictable.

<sup>46</sup> The film records the performers' preparations and rehearsals for parrhesia before they go into public space to speak up. These parts of the film reveal what is happening "behind the scenes": how to speak up, how to communicate the jokes, and potential disagreements over working methods.

### My (The Narrator's) Role in the Film is...

#### *Multiple*

Drawing from *The Female Fool*, I play and improvise with the limits of performing language, shifting from the rational to the mechanical to the emotional voice to whispering... jokes... and laughter. In between I doubt, rehearse, repeat, and reflect on the existing material.

#### *Mono*

My interior monologue allows for a navigation through the existing material: the interior desktop-computer shots (where I arrange and organize the existing material) keep pointing to the dialogical with the external shots, including interactions in public space. Viewers are encouraged to reflect upon their own social interactions, as they live both physically and online through several screens.

#### *Connective vs Conjunctive*

Following an improvisational reading of the script's scenes, I become fed up with this reshuffling of material on the desktop's screen and shift to the conjunctive mode, becoming completely absorbed by the filmed material and embodied in it. From that part of the film onwards, colors become intensely bright. I am not visible anymore, but I am present through my voice.

### Screenplay

To articulate this film project, writing a script seemed the most suitable option. The result was the scenario for the rehearsals, tests, and experiments that I conducted with the performers and artistic team. Throughout the script two colors (black and blue) are employed to indicate its distinct voices. In total there are seven voices: those of the four authors I commissioned to write texts, jokes, or sketches (Dimitris Dimopoulos, Pieter De Buysser, Joep Vosseveld, and Margo van de Linde), that of puppeteer Denise Castermans, that of set and costume designer Esther van de Pas, and that of myself. My own voice in the script, both as scriptwriter and as caretaker of the parts decided collectively through discussion among several participants, is indicated by Times New Roman and in black. This is the typeface and color I use in all other chapters of my dissertation as well. The texts in blue Times New Roman indicate all the other voices. In alternating between these two colors, the script not only acts as a scenario, but also testifies to the process through which it came into being, tracing how different voices have found their way into it. Furthermore, the reader can read the complete authors' jokes, texts, and sketches on pages 197–223. Denise Castermans specifically contributed to the rendering of Pieter De Buysser's texts into filmic scenes 14, 21, 33, and 34. Esther van de Pas contributed to the costume and prop descriptions in scenes 9, 20, and 27. The list of performers, the full script, and the authors' jokes, texts, and sketches in complete form can be found in Appendix 2 of this dissertation (pages 165–226).

## Torn between Research Process and End Product

To recapitulate, the idea behind the film *Casting Call* was that it could be considered the outcome, the montage, in which the three other stages of the parade would come together. My intention was to treat it as a carrier of parrhesia that goes beyond representation, demonstrating various opinions and voices, by unfolding as a multilayered parade from one joke, location, and character to another, with actions succeeding images succeeding language, one after the other. Throughout the film, the re-appearing pattern of a polyrhythmic parade is suggested. Through the input of the audible,<sup>47</sup> I proceed into the making of moving image, audiovisual, and performative works. *Casting Call* recycles the sounds of parades and demonstrations that took place in Brussels and Maastricht to develop its style and narrative structure. The audio is the main associating and unifying element within its overall construction. Through this approach, it is suggested to the spectator that the parade, *Casting Call*, is an ongoing process throughout the film. Varied shooting styles permit an exploration of the topic of parrhesia through different lenses (discursive, documentary, fictional, and so on).

Out of the script's thirty-six scenes, twenty scenes (1–5, 17–27, 29, 31–32, 36) were shot in 2018 and 2019, resulting in short videos and filmic notes. This is because although the project received development support from VAF (Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds), it was not supported further in the next stage (production). Instead, it received funding from several other sources (mainly visual arts funds, art institutions, performance festivals, and foundations with a focus on social engagement and cultural exchange), which allowed for production and post-production of a limited number of scenes. This peculiar way of producing a film in parts and the lengthy periods between the production of a limited number of scenes intensified a conflict of interests between my roles as a film director and as a visual artist.

The ongoing conflictual and antagonistic relation between *The Narrator/Engaged Artist/Filmmaker* and *The Narrator/Engaged/Visual Artist* does not seem to reach a resolution. In thinking of the parade as a format of presentation, a structuring tool, and an end product, parade as process and parade as outcome, the conflict goes over the following question: Is the end-product of this research *Casting Call* the film or *Casting Call* the manifestations, attempts, and events stemming from this process? In the first case, the filmmaker/director assumes total responsibility and control: she will make the final choices, editing and manipulating the material, and thereby expose her very personal account of parrhesia. In the second case, the end product consists of several staged and improvised actions documented within the frame of an ongoing open-ended process — an invitation to participation.

*The Narrator/Engaged/Filmmaker* rehearses speaking out on Hybridity\* and Solo — Collaboration:

From a filmmaker's perspective, the term "hybridity" relates to topics directly implicated in the medium of film, such as film's transformation from an analogue medium to a digital one and how new digital filmmaking methods influence the production of image and its form, as well as "the memory of both the image and the filmmaker," therefore potentially expanding the role of the filmmaker to that of "metahistorian," as Jihoon Kim suggests in his book *Between Film, Video, and The Digital: Hybrid Moving Images in the Post-Media Age* (Kim 2016, Chap. 3). Hybridization in film also concerns

<sup>47</sup> My definition of the "audible" centers around the human voice as carrier and producer of meaning (mainly through language), but it also includes utterances, unidentifiable sounds, silence, pauses, waiting modes, and moments just before the articulation of speech.

crossovers between genres, for example between fiction and documentary. This dates back to the beginning of the twenty-first century, to what critic Robert Koehler calls the "early years of the golden age of cinematic in-betweenness," with several films deliberately crossing the borders/divisions of classical film categories fiction and documentary or non-fiction (Stam 2015, 206).

Reflection on hybridity takes place in and through the film *Casting Call*, as it alternates from desktop documentary to fiction to classic documentary shots and a mix of professional and phone cameras. *Casting Call* is an essay-film that considers activating memory to be an act of resistance and the medium of film as a weapon. When film images conjunct, associations are produced. Film has also the power to create disassociation, thus reinforcing the viewer's political imagination through montage.

As a film director, I used performative strategies and opened the filmmaking process to writers, performers, artists, and voluntary and accidental audience members, and engaged them in it. Working democratically with the material was a conscious decision because this method best served the purpose of exploring the theme of parrhesia through filmmaking. As I have already conducted several experiments and shot adequate exterior footage with my characters during the above-described phases, once I shoot the remaining scenes I will have all of the playing cards, the cinematic material, in my hands. I will re-compose these shoots in order to narrate a tale on speaking out, boldly, about Europe today. I will bring the film project to its conclusion in close collaboration with the editor and sound designer. I deeply care for the input offered by the various participants and contributors. Although I have no intention of misusing their democratically gained input, I find it important to respect the medium I set out to serve. In taking the editing decisions on my own, I assume responsibility for the film's outcome and speak up my mind as director. To not betray the spirit of this working method, which was intended to be non-representational, I avoid assuming a representative's take and chose to focus on *The Narrator* instead. Through my multiple perspective as *The Narrator*, I offer my personal account of how I experienced the process and become accountable for it. What is left of the democratic procedure are its traces in specific scenes.

*The Narrator/Engaged/Visual Artist* rehearses speaking out on Hybridity\* and Solo event vs Collaborative events:

Through *Casting Call* I deal with the aspect of hybridity in two ways. Firstly, I assume a multiplicity of roles. As the director-caretaker-assembler-juggler of this project, I am actively involved in the entire process of making it, and I am held responsible both for holding it all together and for the end result. It is a fragile balancing act. I decide on several key elements, determine the structure and components, and set some parameters. These include the questions asked and the methods used to explore them: jokes, locations, costumes, and human participation (invited and voluntary as well as unexpected, external, and accidental). I purposefully keep a space open in order to welcome the other. Each writer, performer, and contributor in this project carries geographically embedded references and gestures that reflect personal associations to comic traditions and European diversity. They communicate through a *common language*, but do not share the same culture (language, religion, and values). This condition marks a shifting territory of inclusion and exclusion, embodying disagreements and misunderstandings, issues that this project wishes to address. Gathering the courage to speak one's mind with, against, or through others is a process of trial and error, never a final situation.

Secondly, I treat *Casting Call* as a hybrid stage-set between visual arts, performance, and film. (I bring theatrical tools into visual arts and use performative strategies.)

Michel Chion describes the differences between theater and cinema as follows: “The cinema does not employ a *stage*, even if from time to time it might simulate one, but rather a *frame*, with variable points of view” (Chion 1999, 22). There is a long tradition in the exploration of stage-frame relations in the visual arts (see for example Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman in Chapter II). I suggest that the synthesis of different mediums (performance and digital film and social media) will provide insights about the contemporary role of parrhesia.

In her essay “Between Theater and Film,” Susan Sontag explores differences and converging points of cinema (which she identifies as an object or product) and theater (which she identifies as performance). However different they are in their existence, she writes, “the object aspect of film, the performance aspect of theater are merely means — means to the experience, which is not only ‘of’ but ‘through’ the film and the theatre event” (Sontag 2005, 143). In my stage/set the performers picture their acts live in public space. At the same time, I employ the medium of digital film to record these acts. In my stage/set, by interchangeably moving from the stage to the frame and back, one can experience attempts to speak up through a cross-examination of media. I record the attempts in order to draw conclusions for my research. These recordings are not simply treated as documentation. I embrace the communicative\* power of the cinematic. The interference of language and the senses is embodied in parrhesia, but also in film. Using the detour of the imaginary and the artificial to be able to speak directly is a valid strategy for relating film as a construction to parrhesia. It emphasizes the importance of fiction and the magic of cinema, showing how imagination offers other ways of speaking out.

My method aims to challenge existing hierarchies and stereotypes about borders between individual and collective thinking. I see the filming process as a temporary, communal platform, a niche that offers both invited and unexpected casual participants the opportunity to express their ideas. Everyone who contributes to this process helps steer the direction of the project. This involves tensions, conflicts, and disagreements. Working this way provides space for several minds to come together and surprise ourselves, instead of executing a vision predetermined by an “individual artist.”

In *Casting Call*, I use the filmic tests and the construction of a film to create a temporary cultural-social space that enhances future social imaginaries. I offer live experiences and record these attempts in order to address virtual and future audiences. To a large extent the result is shaped by the choices of multiple actors and participants, yet I also inscribe myself in it. In doing so, I alternate between assuming authority (being the director) and letting go (depending on the participants’ input). I develop a structure with gaps to be filled by others. Through this participatory and performative process, I keep redefining my position and my responsibilities as an artist.

Although I consider the project ongoing, an outcome certainly exists. The outcome consists of an accumulating body of works and texts remaining from the research process — leftovers to be cared for — that document several parts of the process, from imagining to actualizing parts of the parade.

*Casting Call* takes shape and produces its outcome precisely through the numerous opportunities it provides for exchange with all of the project’s participants and contributors, and for investigating through and with them how one’s words and actions affect others in the process of speaking up, sharing a joke, addressing listeners, and provoking dialogue. At the same time, *Casting Call* is not a collective work. It is an artistic project initiated and led by me, through which I have conducted my research since 2016. It is my project because I am the one with the urgent need to answer the research questions that I set out to explore, and who chose to invite people to help me explore them. I am the one responsible for developing, financing, and holding the project together.

### Paying Attention to the Script: Between Documenting and Event\*

*The Narrator*’s distracted preoccupation with the conflicting perspectives and ways of operating described above continued for several months. The liberating answer came to her only after she had fully imagined, described, and finalized her exact role in the film and how the film would be realized. It then became clear to her that in *Casting Call* it is the circulation from the process to the product and back, through its documentation, that matters. To clarify, by product I mean the body of leftovers stemming from the rehearsals and try-outs of this ongoing process, which accumulate and which must be cared for, as they permit the collectivity of the participants to go back and inspect what has happened. These include *Casting Call*’s script as well as an exhibited installation unfolding as a parade, demonstrating the steps taken throughout my research, providing evidence of what I have been creating and writing about — exhibits as testifiers — and inviting the visitor to partake in a sensorial experience. The exhibits include printed journals, filmic notes (shot between 2017 and 2020), drawings of costumes and characters, performance documentation, and objects (such as props, costumes, and displays). These have served as aids, testers, and witnesses through the project’s circulation from solitary individual practice to participatory dialectic attempts to address an audience.

The role of the script is central in this circulation. *Casting Call*’s script is both an outcome, a montage in which the three other stages come together, a work in itself, and a part of this “opera aperta” process. The state of the script can be considered, interchangeably, as a documenting process, a document, and “material.”<sup>48</sup> Its scenes may always be (re)activated. The script contains specified dialogues, but the actions are only sketched out in the script; as rehearsals proceed and the action is worked out with the participants, new parameters and conditions for parrhesia to take place emerge. The script remains open to the potentiality of an event.

In a short introduction to Alain Badiou’s philosophy, philosopher Fabien Tarby compares the moment of the occurrence of an event to a “surprising resurfacing of elements that were, until then, not presented in this situation” (Badiou and Tarby 2013, 142). I would like to bring in two examples of how I have encountered such occurrences during the shooting of *Casting Call* scenes. Having personally witnessed these episodes, I argue that they perfectly embodied in microscale the notion of the “event” in Badiou’s sense of something happening, capable of partially disrupting or exceeding the present structure, or rather the *situation* (ibid., 142).

The first example concerns a test for Scene 32 in Gallery Bortier, Brussels in December 2017, where Sahra and Jessica improvised the movement and gestures of the *Collectors of Proverbs* while uttering the words “Solidarity,” “Europe,” “Democracy,” “Language,” “Pluralism,” “Migration,” and “Prosperity” (the seven concepts) in various European languages. Having borrowed some books from a bookseller within the shopping arcade, they improvised walking and balancing the books as collectors’ hats upon their heads. At some point Sahra accidentally dropped a book on the floor. This sudden development led to a verbal outburst from the bookseller, who, disturbed by the possible damage of her merchandise, shouted at them to put the books back and leave, or she would call the police. The book-accident interruption allowed for a caricature of anti-European sentiments in favor of the bookseller’s

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I owe my understanding of the script as “material” to Sylvère Lotringer. His reflection on the role of tape recorders in his work interviews strongly resonates with the role I attribute to *Casting Call*’s script. See Lotringer 2016.

national identity to surface (“Speak in French, please. We are in Belgium. French or Flemish”) from below the polished surface of a well-educated Western European antiquarian bookseller.



The second example concerns Scene 27 of the script (see Appendix 2, pages 189-190), in which the camera follows *The Narrator* slowly walking along the bridge leading to Maastricht’s Provinciehuis. *The Animal Group* (Shila, Sahra, Simone, and Joep), wearing business suits and animal masks of a fox, a dog, a rabbit, and a goat respectively, move faster than *The Narrator*. They arrive before the Provinciehuis. *The Animal Group* refers to the animals wearing costumes in Honoré Daumier’s lithograph *The Conference of London*, depicting a painful historical moment from the redistribution of Europe in the 1830s. Daumier assigned animal traits to the great European powers involved in redrawing the borders between Belgium, Luxemburg, and Holland. The dog represents the Netherlands (Holland), the fox Britain, the hare France, and so on. These animal-headed figures are shown discussing a document while stepping obliviously on the corpse of a woman — Poland; Holland and Belgium are chained and crucified on the left and right sides of the image respectively. *The Animal Group* try three variations of coming together and taking turns to rhythmically embody parts of Pieter De Buysser’s parable-joke on Democracy in a press-conference manner. *The Narrator’s* voiceover recites the joke, while camera and performers enter a choreographic dialogue, ranging from standing still to dynamic movement (dancing, laughing, clapping hands).

On November 8 2019, at the exact date and time we planned to shoot the “Democracy” scene in front of the Provinciehuis, Maastricht, four performers (*The Animal Group*), the crew, and myself encountered a local protest against plans to build a new airport in the region. This accidental meeting strangely resonated with our plan and the commissioned “Democratie” text by Pieter De Buysser, in which a dispute between a cosmopolitan and a nationalist takes place as their plane crashes. While the crash is avoided at the last minute, the text develops into an allegory of animals offering the best form of democracy ever imagined. The sounds of the protesters intermingled with the improvised joke. People thought the performers were members of De Partij voor de Dieren,<sup>49</sup> a Dutch political group that champions animal rights, which came in support of the protest. As local journalists took photos of the performers marching in unison, the reality of the performed text and that of the protest merged into one. The protesters felt empowered by the presence of the animal group, who contributed their playful and humorous presence to the dynamics of the protest. For a fleeting moment, the increased theatricality of their costumes and postures parading among the protesting crowd resonated with Ute Meta Bauer’s remarks on theatricality’s potential: it “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 his essay *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), Rancière rejects the binary opposition of passivity versus action in spectacle. He proposes that the relations between viewing and acting be rethought by considering any spectator active in their ability to interpret and turn what they see into their own stories. Rancière defines “emancipation” as “the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look, between individual and members of a collective body” (Rancière 2009a, 19). Between the one who knows and the one who doesn’t, between the one who acts and the one who looks, he argues that “distance is not an evil to be abolished but the normal condition of any communication” (ibid., 10).

Back in the times of *Karagöz* and *Ortaoyunu*, cultural distances between spectators of various ethnicities were openly addressed. A circle of community was formed around *Karagöz*, with spectators celebrating misunderstandings between each other — the unit of measurement for what separated them from each other was laughter\*. Differences and distances among an ethnically diverse community were used affirmatively. In attempting to relate to local communities, *Casting Call’s* research came across many distances and the practice was in finding methodologies for measuring them. In this way we, as participants, tried to understand what happened when we come together, to interrogate but also accept the distances that occurred, and to embrace, when necessary, the impossibility of communicating.

Inclusive of all types of distances, and succeeding and failing to cross them, the area I have been trying to trace and understand resonates with Bifo’s interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic methodology. Bifo identifies the production and sharing of meaning as a singular event: when my intention of meaning enters “into vibrational syntony (or sympathy)” with other singularities, the event may be shared and proliferate (Berardi 2014, 17).

In the microevents I describe above, our shooting sessions and other people’s realities and vibrations merged into one. However, not everyone who witnessed the scene recognized it as an “event” in the sense of Žižek’s definition as “a change of the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage in it” (Žižek 2014, 12) and in Badiou’s sense of the event as something happening that is capable of partially disrupting or exceeding the present structure, or rather the *situation* (ibid., 142). For Alain Badiou, fidelity and testimony are crucial terms in relation to truth and the event, as “being faithful to an event is the means through which we become a subject of truth” (Badiou and Tarby 2013, 154) and for this “it

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The Party for the Animals is a political party in the Netherlands. Among its main goals are animal rights and animal welfare, though it claims not to be a single-issue party.

is necessary to name the event, to recognize its trace and to become ‘incorporated’ within it” (ibid., 143). The central figure in *Casting Call*’s search for the event is *The Narrator*, who is constantly present in the script and its activations and in the dissertation. She relates to both the documentation and the event. In walking along its traces, she becomes fully incorporated in the process.

To get back to the tests, every filmic scene opened up new questions which we had to deal with. In scenes 23–26 of the script, two jokes on Migration take place simultaneously. A crowd plays an adaptation of Dimopoulos’ joke, a Greek game called “Who should stay in the furnace and burn?”: A transparent globe ball is passed around among the members of the crowd. On taking the ball, each player states the name of the European country he or she is playing. All put their right foot in. If it’s a hit, the country hit is out, and if it is a miss, the one that threw the ball is out and goes to hug a pole. There is no winner, only a succession of leaders, turning this game into a triumph of European passivity and inefficiency into passing the globe and its problems from the one to the other. In its Greek version the participants would be actual immigrants trying to win a residence permit. During the discussions in Maastricht’s theater (Scene 2), Simone, Shila, and Sahra adapted the game to a more politically correct, inoffensive version that fitted the roundabout’s particularities (limited space to move around, many columns, risk that the globe-ball is thrown amid the cars). Hetty Van de Velden, production leader of the project in Maastricht, confronted me with a critical question that needed answering. This question concerned Joep Vosseveld’s Dutch joke “Fort Europa,” which would be filmed with him telling it in the foreground of the Stars of Europe sculpture, whereas in the background the extras would play the above-mentioned ballgame. What if the extras (volunteers, Maastricht-based friends, and family that Hetty invited into the project) disagreed with or felt offended by Joep’s mockingly pro-colonial joke? What if I later showed them the finished film and they opposed having their faces associated with such a text? Megera’s paper masks were a solution to that. The masks became a protective tool enabling anonymous participation. Megera’s followers became “the People,” each assuming a playful face by hiding their own.

Zoom out: Panoramic shot of Maastricht’s Europe Stars sculpture from the higher bridge level, above and far away, captures *Shila-Megera* talking to her tablet, addressing her online audience, *Joep-The One that Brings the World Upside Down* performing his pro-colonial monologue about migration on the other side of the stars sculpture, and a crowd of **Anonymous Megera Disciples** wearing **Megera masks** playing a ballgame in between the steel stars and columns of the Stars Sculpture in the background. Like me as artist/researcher, the project’s participants and contributors also move along a Mobius strip that continually shifts from an individual practicing a monologue to dialogical collaborative attempts and failures among these individuals. *Casting Call* has been affecting us and we keep practicing parrhesia and challenging our minds throughout this process. The correspondence between Sahra Huby and myself that follows Appendix 2 (pages 229–235) testifies to this.

To conclude, in my efforts to investigate, as an artist, what happens in this process of attempting to speak up, share a joke, grasp listeners’ attention, and provoke dialogue, I started on my own by placing myself in the middle of the research, working as a solitary artist. Subsequently I reached out to others and investigated this process with, against, and through them. I explored the model of parrhesiastic theater by creating situations within which the limits of the roles in relation to the authority of the artist-maker-participant-performer were claimed, negotiated, and examined through our hybrid stage sets between visual arts, performance, and film. In these situations, the performers continually fell in and out of role of the characters they assumed. During the co-working periods, I refrained from acting as aesthetic judge of others’ proposals and contributions (of what is good or bad, funny or insulting) and attempted to function as a caretaker and an “assembler,” letting the other voices in instead. Between several roles

and limitations, *Casting Call* developed into a site of negotiation for all the tensions and disagreements that arose as we, as participants, were confronted by the limits between “I” and “we.”

Although *Casting Call* is an ongoing project, there is an outcome: a body of leftovers ranging from printed journals, film notes (shot between 2017 and 2020), drawings of costumes and characters, performance documentation, and objects (such as props, costumes, and displays), stemming from the rehearsals and try-outs of this ongoing process, which accumulate and which must be cared for, as they permit the collectivity of the participants to go back and inspect what has happened. These leftovers will be exhibited to provide access to viewers and future participants in the process.

In my search for parrhesiastic theater as a model for artistic practice, these tensions, struggles, and compromises regarding my various roles and tasks within this film project led me to answers regarding my research sub-questions. To the question “Can we think of the parrhesiastic theater artist as a hybrid\*, assuming a role between archive, amplifying instrument for other voices, and caretaker?”, I would respond that there is a tendency among parrhesiastic theater artists to value hybridity and work in hybrid ways. They combine various mediums and/or roles in their practices, for example. The active combination of hats they wear (that of archivist, of amplifying instrument for other voices, of provocateur, of caretaker and so on) may be detected within a long list of contemporary artists, from Christoph Schlingensiefel (theater director, performance artist, filmmaker, provocateur) to Jeanne van Heeswijk (artist, facilitator, community-to-community projects, Trainings for the Not Yet) to Kader Attia (artist, curator, and founder of La Colonie), to name just a few examples. The various roles that parrhesiastic theater artists assume help them develop strategies of dissent and confrontation, to provoke engagement and produce affect, and to enhance the possibility for their own and other voices/ bodies to “appear.” I therefore positively identify the parrhesiastic theater artist as someone assuming a number of roles, but not as a hybrid.

In looking at parrhesiastic theater as a model for artistic practice, it is not only possible but necessary to think of it as both the process toward an event and as the event itself. In *Casting Call* it is the circulation from the process to the product and back again through its documentation that matters. Remaining faithful to the path opened up for her by the Gezi Park protests event in 2013, *The Narrator* keeps walking along its traces. In doing so she thinks of *Casting Call*, the process. Between the frames of the scenes that have been shot and those not yet realized in *Casting Call*’s script, she looks for the opportunity for the next micro-parrhesiastic event to take place in the successive line of micro-events that shape this ongoing parade.