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to visual material!

The Body Makes a Landscape

Un|Settled Residency

28/07/18-04/08/18

7:00-0:00

An open and performative space

... for gathering, practicing and publishing possibilities for an ever-moving-migrating-humanity. People move, from country to country, every day, often with great effort and against their will. Things move, from one state to another, from energy to matter, from thought to practice.

What are the causes that trigger this shifting and why will it never end? How to deal with movement that makes the known uncertain?

During one week, you can adjust your schedule to the daily Un/Settled Residency routine: sharing the space at the same hour each day or at different times depending on the activities occurring; by watching, joining or just hanging out.

Heike Langsdorf and Ernst Maréchal coordinated an open performative space called Un|Settled Residency, open for the public during one week and from 7am to midnight, as part of the program of Un|Settled (KAAP) and Theater aan Zee. Un|Settled Residency is about the un|settling conditions of migration. In order to broaden our understanding of migration Langsdorf and Maréchal invited a diverse group of people — Isabelle Wahedova, Leo Kay, Wayaba Tokpwi and Dieudonné Zoko Ngavuka, Winde Nulens, myself and other guests — to share their perspectives and develop artistic practices in the space. Both the diversity of artistic practices and the durational aspect (to take time!) of this project allows for the prism of stereotypes about migration to get ever-more nuanced.

Passersby at the sea-dike of Ostend would be struck to what at first sight seems to be a pop-up store with ... Arabic language on the vitrine. A host would meet the confusion and welcome people to have a look, hang out or participate in the Un|Settled Residency. When entering the space, there is a sense of being on a construction site. The unpolished concrete reminds of a desolate landscape, whereas the surface of the platform at the center of the space colour-changes throughout the day from grey, blue, green to pink carpeted lands. In this rough and ever-changing landscape, the daily routine starts at seven o'clock in the morning with body practice guided by Heike Langsdorf. As the silent sitting meditation develops into a movement meditation, our [bodies wake up](#). A visual reading of the floor wakes up our brains and leads us into the space. Subsequently, we transit towards the communal table where we will soonish start baking sourdough bread with Leo Kay and his daily guest(s): Anyuta Wiazemsky, Kim Snauwaert, Rares Craiut, Geert Vaes, Gosie Vervloessem, Spela Petric, Sina Seifee. Leo Kay's artistic practice is a ritualisation of the fermentation process. During the bread making, we contemplate on the fermentation and digestion of ideas in times of hyper productivity. We embrace the messiness of the bread making and consider the equally [messy interaction of different cultures and micro-organisms](#) during the fermentation process. The Un|Settling Bakery ends with a spell and a wish for the future. As such, the deepening process of the ritual sets the conditions for slow thinking on behalf of the future. Next up, are the Un|Settling Walks & Gestures. We experience the culture of the deaf as we [learn to communicate](#) on a whole different level during a workshop sign language. After about 90 minutes having giggled and concentrated on countless possibilities to figure with our fingers, wrists, hand palms for the making of gestures — indulging into a for us foreign form of communication — we are literally demanded to exit this world. Dieudonné Zoko Ngavuka, a Congolese political refugee based in Brussels (and is so much more than that), takes us for a walk. After a 5 minute walk we are asked to stop walking and line up in a row, leaving equal distance between us. We are ordered and assisted to put on blindfolds and take each other's hands. Now bound to each other, we resume our walk. In the midst of the visual quietness we hear Dieudonné's voice loud and clear: "Avancer! Avancer!" Somebody carefully pulls out my shoes. My feet touch the water. "[N'est pas peur! N'est pas peur!](#)" When water comes up to my knees, I get the instruction to

pull off my blindfold. I see the sea and hear the most humoristic irony I ever experienced: “C’est une grande surprise!” At first instance, I could not help but associate this experience with the forced migration of African slaves. In this case, however, the roles are turned around. More than anything, the blind walk is an exercise in trusting each Other.

At noon nothing must be done and [everything can happen](#). The platform has changed into a green meadow and somebody has put on a record... A perfect moment to delve into the Un|Settling Library and cut up a sentence that you find worthwhile to put on the publishing wall (a registration of what has been happening at Un|Settled Residency as some-kind of activist shout-out on migration). Or you might want to curl in the ‘settling’ carpets and take a siesta. In the meantime, Ali Bayat, a political refugee from Afghanistan based in Ostend, shares his culture through his food and makes sure that every member of the team is well-fed. The latter he never manages — neither at lunchtime nor for supper — as he always feeds many more than planned; a mystery that runs through the week.

After lunch, Isabelle Wahedova, who has a Czech and Syrian background and currently works in the migration department of the European Commission (and is so much more than that), covers the central platform with blue plastic with the help of available co-practitioners. Un|Settling Borders is about to start. Once seated in the [plastic blue sea](#), Isabelle asks us to fill in a quiz on the topic of migration. It is an attempt to generate more awareness on the realities of migration from a juridical point of view. Following, she asks all participants to draw up their preferred destination (if they would have to move). As we find ourselves listening to each other’s explanations about why one would move to a certain country, we get to grasp some of our own privileges/disadvantages concerning migration. Wayaba Tokpwi, a writer and Congolese political refugee based in Brussels (and is so much more than that), concludes Un|Settling Borders with a heartfelt recital of a poem. [Let’s listen to him just a little bit longer...](#) As the plastic blue sea disappears, the platform gets filled with microphones and lots of little stuff. Heike Langsdorf and Ernst Maréchal move between the stuff and generate an awesome sound. Un|Settling Fingers embarks. Following, Langsdorf and Maréchal create a composition that grows subtle noise into space-filling thunder and is build back to silence. After they show us how it’s done, we get to create our own soundscape. One by one, our hands [migrate through the stuff](#). This time on, the entry point on the topic of migration happens very much on an intuitive level. Our hands move, from thing to thing, we don’t pause nor wonder why. Un|Settling Fingers can be seen as the inner score of Un|Settled Residency as it is some kind of agglomeration of actions. We approach things as hands-on as possible and together we create a sound that reminds in one way or another of migration.

It’s already 18 o’clock! [We roll out the green meadow and settle down for supper](#). it’s the only moment of the day where we have time to really fade out... During the whispering bar people have a drink and a chat. Usually, this is the moment where some people take the time to make a selection of words/sentences — that have been registered with an old-school typing-machine during the course of the day — and cut them up so that they can be displayed on the publishing wall. Off course, all of this happens in a whispering tone.

After supper, we roll out the pink carpet and are grateful to welcome [our daily guest\(s\)](#). During the course of the week we welcome Angela Al Souliman, Saddam Shkair, Anna Luyten, Stijn Oosterlyck, Taif Preshini, Irina Lavrinovic, Asher Lev, Barabara Raes, Peter Aers, and Anouk Llaurens. Their (artistic) practice varies from a lecture to a nude body performance, exchanging (life)stories and collective silence. Every single one of our guests shared experiences and ideas, different perspectives and many more. At about 10 o’clock we end the day with an Un|Settling Dance. In order to digest the heavy topic(s) of the day, we get out of our heads and into our bodies. This does not mean that we try to forget all about it. On the contrary, we dance on an idea that keeps on resonating in our minds after spending a certain amount of time in the Un|Settled Residency. Together with our guest and applying a collection of fake crystal objects, we set our intention and give the nightly dance a name. Every single day we name yet another crystal object: the guests pick one of the still available crystals, say the name of the dance, and places it in the middle of the pink dance floor next to the other objects (chosen previously by former guests and reassembled in the evening). We dance for the way in which we help. We dance for solidarity. We dance for the landscapes we are ... After a so-called warm-up, where Heike carefully proposes exercises, doable for any-body — be it trained or not, young, old, fragile or disabled — we engage in a bodily exploration of two movement principles: shaking and continuity. Eventually it happens: [Every-body shakes](#). To be able to be ‘flexible’ enough to shake the body, one has to ‘stabilise’ a certain body part. Indeed, we end the day with a dance that is itself an ultimate metaphor for being ‘un|settled’.

Un|Settled Residency takes place in public space. Similar to Heike Langsdorf's 'Sitting with the body 24/7', the large windows remind of a space with commercial purposes. The vitrines of the commercial space can easily be associated with issues of representation in what Guy Debord described as a society of the spectacle. It raises questions like: Who is represented in the debate about migration? How are they represented? Does 'the image of the migrant' truly represent 'the migrant'? Underneath all of this, there is a harsh critique on the liberalisation of the arts. The vitrines allude to capitalism, but once you enter the space time slows down. Instead of the speed of capitalism, we experience slowness. It is an invitation to engage. We take time to – truly – encounter each other. We negotiate ideas, perspectives, doings, different types of knowing, different cultures, and forms of collaboration in what seems to be a temporary community. Consequently, not only the space itself, but also the people within the space are in constant transformation. Un|Settled Residency might not look as a finished product - this unfinished space shows literally and figuratively its rough patches - but it allows space for vulnerability, risk, and experiment. In doing so, Un|Settled Residency lends itself as a testing ground for what Jeroen Peeters called 'makeshift societies'.¹ Heike Langsdorf and Ernst Maréchal have set the conditions for a situation in which ... things can happen. The setting is 'vague enough' for people to take things into their own hands. Martina Ruhsam describes such a strategy as following: "Rather than about being about the manipulation of the audience's gazes to favored directions (usually in order to make them coincide as much as possible with the gazes of the authors) in order to elucidate a certain meaning or way of understanding, it is about potentially enabling the spectators to make decisions in the process of observation and to enhance their awareness of their function as co-producers of the performance-event."² Indeed, the 'authors' did not impose any pre-set idea of migration. On the contrary, they invited other people, including the audience, to share their knowledge on migration. The diverse artistic practices at Un|Settled Residency allowed for what Heike Langsdorf calls 'thinking through practices'. Un|Settled Residency presents a landscape of *experiences* through which we can *think* different types of knowledges. During the course of the week it became clear that diverse notions of migration are also to be found within the body itself. Indeed, every-body is made up from the landscape that it inhabits: from molecular transformations to seas being crossed. As such, Langsdorf, Maréchal and their co-creators were able to diversify the notion of migration without imposing a popular (and often platonic) concept of migration. The coming together and the exchange that has taken place during the course of one whole week, has been constitutive for the result of what is the performance. To take time (slowness) and to allow for a work-in-progress (no finished product), is to enable for a prolonged (re)presentation in which several contradictory ideas can co-exist. As such, the stereotypes of migration dissolved into the paradoxical dimension that contemporary society is and every-body inhabits. The other way around, the bodies we are generate the landscapes we live in.

¹ Jeroen Peeters, *Makeshift Communities of Practice. Notes on Sitting with the body 24/7 by Heike Langsdorf and radical_hope*, August 10, 2018. <http://sarma.be/docs/3101>.

² Martina Ruhsam, "Dramaturgy of and as Collaboration," *Maska* 16, no. 131-132 (2010): 31.