

Blow Pow ! 8

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Interview Blow!8 Festival curious B. Linne

How did you get the idea to organize a festival, in which exclusively female artists show their performances?

Before I decided to start as a co-organizer of the festival Blow!, Helge Meyer was working with the idea to invite only female artists. When Helge asked me what I thought about the idea, spontaneously different critical questions came to my mind. However, I was curious how and if a gendered festival would be different from other festivals, so we decided to invite eight international performance artists.

What were the arguments against a "women's festival", from your point of view?

From my perspective, it's quite fascinating to consider the performances from the gender aspect. There are interesting questions. For example: Are performances by women especially feminine? Also the social aspect is interesting - the interaction between the artists during the festival was different from a mixed-sex festivals. However, I had no interest to introduce a quota for female artists, despite the fact that it is often visible that in festivals there are more male performers invited than female performers. However, in performance workshops in colleges/universities, women are often in the majority. To counteract this phenomenon, it would be better to invite four male and four female performers, rather than choosing the most extreme opposite variant. I also was concerned that the gender issue could be very much in the center.

That means you present a "women's festival" in which the gender issue should not be discussed?

For me it was a good decision to deal with these questions during the seminars with Helge's students at the university. "Does art have a gender?" was the theme of the seminars, and the students were asked to think about this question in advance. The theme was then discussed with the students and performers in a university seminar. In my view there is no fundamental difference between male and female performances. Naturally, women perform with a female body, which

in this form of art is certainly of great importance, because then image is always influenced by the femininity of the body. However, this is only one aspect, and does not mark the performance as a typical female performance. And if a female artist deals with the theme of gender in a performance, can we consider this performance as a typical female performance? In selecting the performers we did not look for artists who devote themselves especially to the gender aspect in their performances, (but on the other hand, this was not excluded). It was important to show different positions of international female performers. That meant, the intensity and diversity of artistic works for me were the focus, and the idea to present a blend of highly experienced performers and young artists. In my estimation the exchange between artists, in addition with the presentations at the festival, are the most important points. It seems to me that the chance to talk with performers of different generations can be very fruitful.

Were there any reactions from the audience regarding the presentation of exclusively female positions of performance art?

Nobody has approached me on this issue. I had expected that people would ask or would have the wish to talk about that. Especially since for the first time this year, the Blow! 8 Festival took place with a female co-organizer; I thought that our decision would be brought into relation with this fact. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

Will the next Blow! be a festival with presentations of exclusively male positions?

If I would decide this by myself: surely not. If the festival should have a motto at all, in my opinion there are more interesting topics such as the presentation of Duo-performances.

Thank you

Thank you

Interview by B. Linne

Why a festival of female performance artists or do we still need to talk about gender?

The idea of a pure female version of the Blow! Festival in Ilse started somewhere in the back of my brain years ago. As a teacher of art, I am always talking about the difficult position of female artists in art history and actual art processes.

Historically there were few possibilities for women to become "professional" artists because the heads of "male" societies and the patriarchal rules of the art circles saw women fulfilling their "natural" roles as housewives, mothers or supporters of male careers instead.

In my everyday life in school and university, I recognized that questions of gender and the political and social implications of being either male or female does not tend to interest teenage girls or young students so much anymore. Is that a good sign? Do the role models of the past not work anymore in our modern or postmodern society? Is there no need to fight for anything anymore, because men and women own the same rights and have the same chances? Or is there another reason for the non-existence of feminist questions and battles in the thinking of young women today? Does it still matter? Performance Art is maybe THE art form that is influenced and even built up (to a huge percentage) by female artists in the 60's and 70's of the last century. Names like Marina Abramovic, Valie Export, Orlan, Laurie Anderson, Gina Pane, Ana Mendieta or Ulrike Rosenbach are historically very important to the development of the form, and now we have performers like the eight artists in Blow!8 or other very active contemporary performance artists like Julie Andreé T., Tanya Mars or Kira O'Reilly. In more traditional art forms like painting and sculpture, men tried for centuries to keep women out of the art schools and the art market, but in performance art women paved the way.

Does this difficulty still influence the style of art making? Is there a female influence that the audience can recognize in watching a piece of performance art? Does art have an obvious gender?

A seminar that I taught at the university of Hildesheim asked this question in its title. The artists of Blow!8 were invited to talk with the students in a guest lecture about possible answers to this complex question. We did not find one answer...and that is actually good! Otherwise it would be too easy to turn all existing clichés about gender related discussion into stone...

Although the communication between students and artists was very fruitful, it did not provide THE answer, but showed that the theme of gender relation in an art process does matter, and still has a relevance that's worth being discussed. And there is also a strong feeling of mine that some (female) students were more sensitive about their own position after this discussion.

My personal goal in organizing Performance Art is to learn, to communicate and to share. This version of Blow! was a rich way to get deeper into questions that I have been asking myself for a long time. At the end of the festival, I felt sure that I was not alone in taking advantage of the opportunity for discussion and exchange, even if all the questions were not answered in an analytic way.

A big thank you goes to the eight artists who overcame their doubts to participate in this very specific thematic event. The trust they offered us (and me, as the only male in the organizational team of Blow!) was amazing! The level of exchange between the artists, the high school students, and the university students showed that the time was right for asking these important questions in a festival context! Thanks a lot!

Helge Meyer



This catalogue was made in an unusual way: Thanks to the idea of the artist Shannon Cochrane, who participated in Blow! 8, we invited always two of the participating artists to write about each others work. We received texts that were influenced by the time the artists spent together during their stay in Germany and also the talks between them after seeing the work of their related "writing-duo"-partner. For us as curators, this offers a totally fresh and deep insight into the work of the participants. Also the idea to let the artists write in their native language (if they wanted) and find translators to English afterwards, offered the artists a way to write as free and personal as possible. So these texts are mostly not from an art historic background but from an artistic perspective.

We thank the 8 Blow!-artists for their engagement into this unique way of producing an insight into their thinking and the work of their colleagues.

*Photos on the right side:
Johannes Lothar Schröder & Insa Wagner
All other photos by Insa Wagner*



Alice De Visscher



Claudia Bucher



Essi Kausalainen



Shannon Cochrane



Gwendoline Robin



Macarena Perich Rosas



Marilyn Arsem



Sandra Johnston

Essi on ALICE

The room is empty of objects. You are standing in the corner, wearing all white and holding a sheet of paper in front of your chest. Placing your body between the wall and the paper you move with your bare feet. Walking near the wall, towards the windows, and past them.

And as you pass the daylight catches the paper and reveals the colour hiding on the flip side: suddenly everything is glowing

ORANGE.

The rhythm of your walk is steady and calm, the sound of your feet on the rough concrete almost disappears before reaching our ears. You just let the light, the colour, travel. Walking past all the windows: one, two, three, four, five. We are in no hurry. You climb on to the window sill, leaving the landscape, (blue sky grass, green, the trees yellow light) behind you, and start to built an intangible space of your own.

The whiteness of your clothes, the pale skin, the walls, are all ready to adjust to the brightness of the colour – the light. The folds of the textile, the skin, creating shadows, miniature landscapes, structures.

And then. There is another paper GREEN

revealed under the orange. Suddenly there are all the layers of orangeness and greenness and whiteness.

A spectacle!

The layers of light and shadow and body and air:

All the layers reflecting each others, colliding, crashing, colouring, shining

All the layers mixed and individual.

The space is full of air, full of possibilities.

All the colours

all the light

all the bodies

the shapes

the distances

the landscapes

the universe

our bodies

All in a sheet of a paper.







Macarena on Claudia

Everytime Claudia performs, she presents a constant dialog with materials, and an objective understanding and a thought-provoking system of art making.

The artist places the audience amidst the specific and pertinent order of the work's installation form, to later break that order by activating her body through movement. In that moment contradictions start to reveal themselves in front of us.

This chaos leads us into a form of visceral perception where textures, colors, aromas and a particular form of repulsive beauty are exposed, which mold the rhythms and sensations of the performance.

We are confronted with a shifting transformation of cultural canons and fixed norms.

Mutations are performed.

She demands that the audience shifts their perspective, creating a bipolarity.

The other side of yourself is provoked.

A logic is created, one that treasures its own order and unique laws. But this logic demands of itself that it be deconstructed in order for the present moment to be fair and just.

It's pure.

Uses light and color; weight and speed.

She plays with different elements and ideas, taking them in directions that suggest movement. She plays with the horizon in order to break it again and again, and create new horizons.

She creates collections of jars, containers, milk cartons: a new species that filters, measures, controls.

Her force leave an impression: traces that are a result of a system that transcends classical narratives.

Bucher proposes this transcendence through the disintegration of materiality.

In this way, it makes sense it disappears.

Translated by Julian Higuerey Núñez
Edited Sojin Chun

Coherencia objetual, un diálogo permanente con los materiales y un sistema provocador de obra, es lo que Claudia nos presenta en cada acción ejecutada.

La artista nos sitúa en un orden pertinente que se hace visible por medio de la instalación de estructuras, que luego rompe con la acción del cuerpo en movimiento. Es cuando el orden se altera y las contradicciones comienzan a relacionarse delante de nosotros.

El caos nos conduce a una percepción visceral donde las texturas, la temperatura del color, los aromas y una particular belleza repulsiva, se exponen dosificando los ritmos y las sensaciones.

Nos instala frente a transformación de cánones y prototipos culturales.

Realiza Mutaciones.

Le exige a la audiencia una postura reversible, bipolar.

Provoca el otro lado de uno mismo.

Crea una lógica que debe ser desestructurada, estimando un orden propio y leyes únicas para configurar la vida y la muerte en un presente justo y necesario.

Es limpia.

Utiliza la luz y el color; el peso y la velocidad.

Proyecta los elementos con direcciones que infieren movimientos y juega con el horizonte para romperlo con diversas horizontalidades.

Inventa un grupo de frascos, carteras, cajas de leche: una nueva especie que filtra, mide, controla.

Su fuerza deja huellas: rastros que son consecuencia de un sistema trascendente a la narrativa clásica.

Bucher propone la transcendencia a través de la deformación de la materia.

Así, tendrá sentido desaparecer.







Alice on Essi

Essi's objects are laid out throughout the space. The objects are chosen with care, have little colour, mostly beige (bamboo, natural wooden stool, natural leather shoes) and white (a plate and paper napkins). The objects are placed such that they take up the space in its length with the white objects at the extremities.

Essi enters, calm and focused. Her clothes are selected with equal care: her transparent tights and blouse are skin coloured – referencing the beige of the objects.

Essi walks around the space undertaking actions with the displayed objects. She begins with the pile of paper napkins. She takes one by its corner, it unfolds. She gradually scrunches it up, slowly pulling it into her hand, then lets the newly formed ball fall to the ground. She begins the action anew with another napkin, gripping it more tightly. We live through this simple action with Essi, and we feel the sensation of the napkin crushed in her hand. With each new napkin, Essi changes the rhythm or intensity of the action, pauses... Finally she folds a napkin back up, places it on the pile of those still unfolded and brings the pile to her mouth. From her mouth she deposits a small ruby on the napkins, which become a jewelry cushion.

Essi approaches the wall to reveal the shadow of her body, drawn from the light streaming through the facing window. She picks up a bamboo. She walks, dragging the bamboo behind her, producing a sound against the concrete floor. She continues her walk, at times slightly lifting the bamboo, leaving us with only the idea of its sound.

The bamboo steadily bends back toward the ground and Essi follows in a slow somersault rolling onto her back, and catching her socks as if to complete the circle formed by her body.

The passage from one action to another ensues with a natural, organic flow, but also with a sharp precision and attention to the sensation of the present moment.

Certain actions are effected with the objects, there, where they happen to be in the space: the shoes are slipped on but do not move, as if glued to the floor.

Essi's body forms the shape of a stool, on her hands and knees, on top of the stool itself. She challenges her balance by standing upright on the stool's edge. then losing her balance and finding herself back on the floor. Essi marks her fall by adding a jump when she hits the ground with her feet. This is probably the most abrupt action in the whole performance.

Two mint leaves are placed into the two ends of the bamboo, displaced in a fragile balance reaching towards the shoes.

A tea leaf is lit and burnt just above a small, white plate filled to the brim with water. Essi then drinks the water. She returns to the ruby on the pile of napkins and gently spits the plate water from her mouth. She puts the ruby back in her mouth. This return to the objects used at the beginning of her performance marks its end.

Essi has a sense-based (visual, tactile, aural) and physical (balance) relationship to the object and to the space. Her body, the objects, and the space seem to be conceived as if integrated one into the other, working together in an organic way. But Essi never loses control over her actions, which remain carefully structured and refined.

Translated by Victoria Stanton
Edited by Andrea Saemann

Les objets d'Essi sont disposés dans l'espace. Des objets choisis avec soin, peu de couleurs, principalement du beige (bamboo, tabouret en bois naturel, chaussures en cuir naturel) et du blanc (une assiette et des serviettes en papier). Les objets sont placés de façon à prendre l'espace dans sa longueur, les objets blancs aux extrémités.

Essi entre, calme et concentrée. Ses vêtements sont également soigneusement choisis: bas et chemisiers transparents couleur chair rappellent le beige des objets.

Essi parcourt l'espace en effectuant des actions avec les objets disposés. Elle commence par le tas de serviettes en papier. Elle en prend une par un coin, celle-ci se déplie. Elle la froisse progressivement en la ramenant dans sa main puis laisse tomber la boulette ainsi formée. Essi recommence l'action avec une autre serviette, la serrant plus fort. Nous vivons cette action simple avec Essi, nous sentons la sensation de la serviette écrasée dans la main d'Essi. A chaque nouvelle serviette, Essi change le rythme ou l'intensité de l'action, fait un arrêt... Finalement, elle replie une serviette, la repose sur le tas des serviettes encore pliées et porte ce tas à sa bouche. Sa bouche dépose alors un petit rubis sur les serviettes qui deviennent comme un coussin à bijou.

Essi s'approche du mur pour faire apparaître l'ombre de son corps dans la lumière dessinée par la fenêtre d'en face. Elle prend un bambou. Elle marche en laissant traîner le bambou qui sonne sur le sol de béton. Elle continue sa marche en soulevant légèrement le bambou, nous n'avons plus que l'idée du son du bambou.

Le bambou se penche progressivement pour rejoindre le sol et Essi roule sur son dos, attrapant ses bas comme pour terminer le cercle formé par son corps qui roule.

Le passage d'une action à une autre se fait de manière très naturelle, comme organique mais aussi avec une grande précision et une attention à la sensation du moment présent.

Certaines actions sont effectuées sur les objets, là où ils sont dans l'espace: les chaussures sont enfilées mais elles ne bougent pas, comme si elles étaient collées au sol.

Le corps d'Essi forme un tabouret (à 4 pattes) sur le tabouret, puis tente l'équilibre (debout sur le bord du tabouret), pour se rattraper sur le sol. Essi marque sa chute en ajoutant un saut où elle frappe le sol de ses pieds. C'est probablement la seule action brusque de la performance.

Deux feuilles de menthe sont placées dans les deux extrémités du bambou, déplacées dans un équilibre fragile jusqu'aux chaussures.

Une feuille de thé est brûlée au dessus de la petite assiette blanche remplie à ras bord d'eau. Essi boit ensuite l'eau. Elle revient au rubis posé sur le tas de serviettes et y crache doucement l'eau de l'assiette. Elle reprend le rubis dans sa bouche. Ce retour aux objets du début de la performance marque la fin de celle-ci.

Essi a une relation sensible (visuelle, tactile, sonore) et physique (équilibre...) à l'objet et à l'espace. Son corps, les objets, l'espace semblent conçus comme intégrés les uns aux autres et comme agissant ensemble de manière organique. Mais Essi ne perd pas le contrôle de ses actions qui restent soignées, structurées et épurées.







Marilyn on Shannon

Shannon Cochrane's performance begins almost imperceptibly, despite her introduction in which she tells us what she will be doing. She moves into the audience to shake people's hands, thanking them for coming, and then she proceeds, without any particular affect, to engage in three actions. She does them in repetition, sometimes in reverse, repeating, revealing, and transforming each one in different ways.

The materials are everyday materials. Nevertheless, they are striking in their visual presence: three identical dark blue dresses hanging on the wall between the windows that are still bright with daylight. Red plastic buckets, golden shoes, gold glitter. Red silk on a table. A chair. A pillow.

She climbs up on the chair to take down a dress, and removes her jeans and shirt and puts the dress on over her head. She puts on the golden shoes. Then she lifts a red bucket and dumps it over herself. It is full of water. Seeing her drench herself is a surprise.

She crushes the red cloth into her closed hand and miraculously, a red rose on a stem appears. She does it again. It is beautiful, mysterious... It becomes a bouquet of bright red roses. She does it again and reverses it. She reveals the trick.

She approaches another dress. Yes, she puts on a dry dress, and then proceeds again to dump water over her head. I flinch. She emerges dripping, soaked. I imagine the sensation of being wet and cold. Twice. By choice.

Will the action change? Will she do it again? Another dress awaits... My anticipation and anxiety are equal. I experience pleasure at recognizing that the action will happen again, and at the same time concern about the repeated shock of the cold water. It's unavoidable. She changes into the third dress. She drenches herself again for the third time.

Ripping open the pillow and dumping its contents on the floor, she approaches the pile of feathers with the action of jumping rope. As she slowly moves forward, the down begins to rise in clouds and float in the air, to settle in a growing pile behind her. She jumps longer than anyone expects, until she is sweating and out of breath. The audio accentuates the repetition and accumulation. As the time expands and she becomes more tired, it is uncomfortable to watch. Why is she doing it? What does it accomplish? For what reason is she exhausting herself? There is no answer. We must generate our own explanation.

Meanwhile, she is back again to being soaked, and dripping. She takes off the dress, hangs it up again, put on her jeans and shirt and watch and jacket and shoes. She thanks the audience.

On Repetition

Our lives are filled with repeated actions. We live in patterns, engaging in basic functions that fill our days, the necessity of bodily needs – taking in sustenance, expelling waste, sleeping, moving, working, seeking distractions, seeking entertainment, seeking companionship. These daily habits generate equal part pleasure and equal part boredom. They can be satisfying, lulling, and sometimes stultifying. Much less often are they exciting. We do them as a matter of course, in a matter of fact way, almost without thinking, and rarely with histrionics.

What is the pleasure in watching something repeated? On the first viewing, we are discovering the action. We follow it, wondering what will come next. On repeated viewings we can pay attention to other aspects. We know what is to come, and so we might pay attention to how long it takes, or imagine the performer's state of mind, or we might begin to project our own bodies into that of the performer, envisioning how it feels to do it. We begin to think about other implications, or explanations of why it is being done.

The more familiar we become with the action, the more we can pay attention to the minute details, the subtle changes in dynamics and execution. We notice the consequences that the repetition has on the performer's body, such as the effect of physical exhaustion. We notice the transformation or decay of the materials being used. We consider the impact that the activity has on the immediate environment.

Afterthoughts

We don't often take the time in daily life, nor have the consent, to focus closely on another body engaged in activity. I appreciate when the actions, materials and objects are selected for their visual impact. I am perhaps most intrigued when meaning is not so simple or explicit, but when actions and materials can have multiple interpretations and implications. I realize how much pleasure there is in watching repetition. It reminds me that, in fact, nothing can be repeated in exactly the same way. Each time it results in a different outcome, because both I and the performer come to it in a different frame of mind, a changed body, with another understanding. Those nuances of difference are pleasing to recognize, to contemplate.







Sandra on Gwen

On the 9th April 2011 the Belfast to Dublin train was disrupted by a 500kg bomb planted by dissident republicans. Passengers on the train were told there was a security alert and subsequently the train tracks were closed and the major road systems around Newry cut off for a number of hours.

Momentarily it comes alive in the mind, the idea of a bomb, yet, the scale of it is hard to imagine, the device's mechanisms integrated into vital social infrastructures, (in this instance a motorway bridge). Around it the day passes, it sits located but untouched and untouchable, engendering threat. Moving in buses along small country roads manoeuvring around the cordoned off area, passengers observed the scene of a motorway lying abandoned, the lanes taped off with bollards and static police cars, officers measuring out the extent of a safety zone. Measuring the margins of the day redrawn around the viability of the un-detonated object. A contradiction exists in that the planted device might instantaneously detonate and create carnage, or instead, it might lie redundant producing tactical inertia, a volume of stillness around a timing mechanism of unknown duration until it is ultimately defused. This sensation of immanence forces the safety zone to be drawn and redrawn. Travelling around old fears, old memories, old habits, a sense of immunity is triggered in the mind of the person passing in proximity, yet, it is the act of imagining a bomb that is the greater part of its political effect.

I confess that I cannot easily or casually observe the performance actions of Gwendolin Robin, because for me they are charged with latent memories of the spectacle of terrorism that I grew up with in Northern Ireland. However, I must immediately qualify this subjective reaction by stating that for Robin any such associations to terrorism are not intentional, for her the use of explosives is closer to pyrotechnics and a sense of frisson or pleasure with the visual and audio qualities intrinsic to the materials. Robin's intentions become apparent through the other distinctive qualities that are evident

in her performances such as: humour, playfulness and a lyrical responsiveness to place. Therefore, I find in myself a range of contradictory emotions in experiencing the precise spectacles that Robin composes, for the images can be simultaneously entertaining or even beautiful and yet also unsettling. An important aspect of this contradiction is the nuanced nature of the control that Robin exercises in both her relationship to the audience and the chemical explosive matter she is using.

During a performance made in Madrid in 2010 at ACCION!MAD10, Robin produced an action that existed in several parts, each one building to the final image of a walking figure exploding into flames, which reached some 10-15 ft above the body. What was most disturbing for me about this performance was not so much the shock of the ferocity and scale of the flames, but that the woman within this inferno continued to walk forward mechanically, indeed calmly in a circle, the same circle that she has radiated in a range of movements for the preceding half hour. In the final stages of the action flames continued to burn intensely around Robin's head, until she lay down on the ground engulfed in smoke. In this regard the performance created a degree of ethical dilemma for the audience, we watched the explosions with a sense of confidence that the artist was in control of the circumstances that she had orchestrated, but there remained a nagging uncertainty and a will to protect the artist as the events unfolded. Therefore, not only the image of the woman in flames disturbed me, but also a nagging sensation of helplessness in witnessing the spectacle. In this respect an important aspect of how the spectacle is received by the audience, is contained in the rituals of preparation that Robin conducts directly in front of the viewers. She expends time and effort changing into fireproofed clothing, adopting layers of white protective fabric, which subtly dehumanises, making her body faintly robotic in appearance. Issues of destruction, violence and mimicry continue to circulate in contemporary performance art debates, but Robin's

work insistently minimizes the subject of violence and pain. The readings of the actions are neither masochistic nor sensationalist but something more compelling, she creates a dimension of beauty to the horrific image.

Additionally, explosives are not commonly used as materials in performance art perhaps because they carry theatrical connotations, the deliberate production of illusions being seen as a dangerous seduction in relation to ideas of performative authenticity and actuality. Robin is very aware of the need to balance the effects of the spectacle with a diversity of other actions and in so doing slowly building anticipation. The waiting holds value. In effect, her actions preempt the moment of rupture, they explore and choreograph the interim moments of anticipation, and in this way they humanize the destructive elements rather than indulge in the power of the imagery of violence. Examples of these other aspects occurred in Robin's performance for BLOW 8, where key elements of the work involved a series of acoustical interventions that used the particularity of the site chosen for the action. The situation was a derelict industrial structure, shaped like a concave amphitheatre with trees and bushes growing within the central area that sloped upwards to a surrounding wall where the audience viewed the action. Robin used the contours of the concrete base as a sounding board from which she created a range of 'notes' by the manipulation of a long thin tube of glass pulled across the ground slowly disintegrating behind her. The sound was alternated by both the speed at which she moved, the textures of the cracked concrete and the buffering of sound as the glass was dragged across moss and vegetation. In the latter stages a fuse was lit that could be observed burning its course along the inside of the tube that was raised up to Robin's eye in playful mimicry of a telescope. Then in the final action another fuse was observed burning towards a large

mound of fresh soil. As it burned down Robin circled the mound in close proximity rasping down the final length of glass against the concrete, her physical posture indicated through its attentiveness the state of the fuse, until the moment of the explosion when the earth erupts into the air covering a sizable area and reaching the margins of the audience. In this way, the range of acoustics ultimately switched from the high-pitched sounds made by the glass tube to the emphatic blast of the stockpile of explosives buried in a mound of earth.

There are preconceptions of masculinity linked to the handling of dangerous materials. I think it is significant that it is a woman who both orchestrates the explosions and is also imbedded within the reality of the destruction, her body moving within the flames and smoke. The fact that she envelops both roles within her performance: that of 'perpetrator' and 'victim' of the spectacle, is an important aspect of why the audience is engaged and stimulated by her actions. Robin's use of spectacle plays upon the suspense of waiting, the nature of the exact explosion is only known to her, as audience we await an event of unknown dimension and form, herein lies the poetry of the encounter.

A bomb is simultaneously both imaginable and unimaginable, it scintillates on the edge of awareness and part of this enigma is the potency of timing, it flickers on a mental switch between fear and disbelief. Comparatively, in performance spectacle is both explicit (actualised) and covert (imagined) the audience must sift the spaces in-between.







Claudia on Macarena

Two mosquito nets hang from the ceiling and hover slightly above the ground in the air. They are visually connected by a narrow strip of warm, soft animal fur lying on the cold, hard stone floor. Full, white, sanitary bags are carefully arranged and placed in different places in the space. The bag contents are still under wraps, like precious packages on the ground. A pair of boots can be seen, emerging from a black garbage bag. Next to another bag is a full glass of water. The mosquito nets remind me of two delicate houses, with a soft fur pathway between them. Already the initial image evokes various associations, many pieces of a puzzle that I can't put together, but which stimulates my own visual world.

Outside, wearing a crash helmet on her head like a racer, Macarena runs away from onlookers over the meadow and towards a large scaffold in the near distance. The audience follows her hesitantly and arrive to the spot just as Macarena races quickly back into the hall. On the scaffolding is written, "At the world's end, Patagonia overtakes one's body, it is there where it will never be able to claim its own authorship."

When we all arrive back in the hall, Macarena is standing quietly under one of the mosquito nets. Through her strong presence and concentration she puts me under her spell. From the belly down she is naked, vulnerable, delivered. Does the net give her protection? She puts on a diaper. Old women in a nursing home come to my mind - or even my little daughter. Somehow I have to smile, and at the same moment I am uncomfortable at the sight. It makes me concerned.

Macarena puts on a diving mask which is filled with material, masking her view. She is on all four legs crawling like a cat over the narrow fur-way until she arrives at, and then crawls under, the second net. There she takes off her glasses, summons a spectator to her, and gives them a pair of latex gloves which she pulls out of one of the hygiene bags. Macarena blows gently on the net and lets it float back and forth while she has her fingernails painted by the selected audience member.

Macarena puts the diving mask back on and walks blinded, balancing upright along the animal fur, back to the first mosquito net. She does it intensely, so that I can feel

the soft fur under my own feet. She takes off the glass and puts them and the nail polish in front of the net.

She binds cable ties over her feet and puts the glass of water in front of her. The cable ties bind her toes tightly together. First images of mutilation shoot through my head, but then in my imagination her feet transform into animal paws. Macarena again summons an audience member and hands them a pair of latex gloves. Macarena pulls her tongue out with pliers and has the spectator wash it with soap and water. It hurts to watch this scene.

Macarena distributes plastic gloves and leads several audience members to stand under the nets. While they stand there waiting, Macarena drinks an entire bottle of beer, burps. She takes the plastic bag off the boots and steps into them. Water gushes out of the boots. I breathe out and enjoy the sight of the water which is flowing freely across the floor. Finally, Macarena cuts the cords that secured the nets to the ceiling. The nets fall over the audience. They're trapped. Macarena leaves the hall.

As a spectator I'm sucked into the middle of the the action, and my thoughts and feelings about strength, irony, humor and vulnerability, anxiety, disgust, helplessness are thrown back and forth. The poetry of the produced images is broken over and over again. Macarena's actions and generated images recur even days later in my mind, refusing to let me go.

Everything that Macarena does she does with such intensity, full of energy and strength. She loves the material. Like a passionate lover she draws it into herself, feels it and becomes totally immersed in it. She shows me a piece of her home and leads me into a deep world of mystery.

I remember how Macarena spoke about her work during her artist talk. She said, "It's not art, it's life!" For me, her work is an impressive example of how both can blend together.

Zwei Moskitonetze hängen von der Decke herab und schweben leicht über dem Boden in der Luft. Sie sind durch eine Linie aus warmem, weichem Tierfell, das auf dem kalten, harten Steinboden liegt, miteinander verbunden.

Sorgfältig angeordnet und an verschiedenen Orten platziert liegen gefüllte weisse Hygienebeutel, deren Inhalt noch geheim ist, wie kostbare Päckchen auf dem Boden. Durch einen schwarzen Abfallsack zeichnen sich Stiefel ab. Neben einem weiteren Beutel steht ein Glas voll Wasser.

Die Moskitonetze erinnern mich an zwei fragile Häuser, mit einem fellweichen verbindenden Weg dazwischen.

Bereits das Anfangsbild weckt verschiedenste Assoziationen - viele Puzzleteile, die ich nicht zusammensetzen kann, doch die meine eigene Bildwelt anregen.

Mit einem Motorfahrzeughelm auf dem Kopf rennt Macarena wie eine Rennfahrerin von den Zuschauern weg über die Wiese auf ein Gerüst zu. Das Publikum folgt ihr zögerlich, doch bereits rast Macarena zurück in die Halle. Auf dem Gerüst steht geschrieben: „At the world's end, Patagonia overtakes one's body; it is there where it will never be able to claim its own authorship.“

Als wir dann alle in der Halle angekommen sind, steht Macarena ruhig unter einem der Moskitonetze. Durch ihre starke Präsenz und ihre Konzentration zieht sie mich in ihren Bann. Vom Bauch abwärts ist sie nackt, verletztlich, ausgeliefert. Gibt ihr das Netz Schutz? Sie zieht eine Windel an. Mir kommen alte Frauen in einem Pflegeheim in den Sinn - oder auch meine kleine Tochter. Irgendwie muss ich schmunzeln und im selben Augenblick berührt mich dieser Anblick unangenehm, macht mich betroffen.

Macarena zieht sich eine Taucherbrille an, die mit irgendeinem Material gefüllt ist und ihr die Sicht nimmt. Sie balanciert auf allen vieren wie eine Katze über den schmalen Fellweg und kriecht unter das zweite Netz. Dort zieht sie die Brille aus, winkt eine Zuschauerin zu sich und gibt ihr Latexhandschuhe, welche sie aus einem der Hygienebeutel zieht. Macarena bläst sachte an das Netz und lässt es hin- und herschweben, währenddem sie sich von der ausgewählten Zuschauerin ihre Nägel lackieren lässt.

Macarena setzt sich wieder die Taucherbrille auf und balanciert nun aufrecht über das Tierfell zurück zum ersten Moskitonetz. Sie macht das intensiv, so, dass ich selbst das weiche Fell unter meinen Füßen zu spüren glaube. Sie legt die Brille und den Nagellack vor das Netz.

Jetzt stülpt sie Kabelbinder über ihre Füße und stellt das Wasserglas vor sich. Die Kabelbinder schnüren ihre Zehen fest zusammen. Zuerst schiessen Bilder von Verstümmelungen durch meinen Kopf, dann aber verwandeln sich ihre Füße in meinen Gedanken zu Tierpfoten. Erneut winkt Macarena eine Zuschauerin zu sich und reicht ihr ein paar Latexhandschuhe. Macarena zieht sich mit einer Zange die Zunge heraus und lässt sie sich mit Wasser und Seife von der Zuschauerin waschen. Es schmerzt, diese Szene zu beobachten.

Macarena verteilt dem Publikum Plastikhandschuhe und führt ein paar Zuschauer unter die zwei Netze. Währenddem die Zuschauer unter den Netzen warten, trinkt Macarena eine ganze Flasche Bier und rülpst. Sie hebt den Plastiksack von den Gummistiefeln und steigt in sie. Wasser quillt aus den Stiefeln. Ich atme aus und genieße den Anblick des Wassers, welches frei über den Boden fließt.

Dann schneidet Macarena die Schnüre, an denen die Moskitonetze befestigt sind, durch. Die Netze fallen über die Zuschauer. Sie sind gefangen. Macarena verlässt die Halle.

Als Zuschauerin werde ich mitten in das Geschehen hineingerissen, so dass meine Gedanken und Gefühle zwischen Kraft, Selbstironie, Humor und Verletzlichkeit, Beklemmung, Ekel, Hilflosigkeit hin- und hergeworfen werden. Die Poesie der erzeugten Bilder wird immer wieder gebrochen. Macarenas Handlungen und damit evozierten Bilder hallen lange nach, tauchen auch Tage später in meinen Gedanken immer wieder auf und lassen mich nicht mehr los.

Alles, was Macarena tut, macht sie intensiv, voller Energie und Kraft. Sie liebt das Material. Wie eine leidenschaftliche Liebende saugt sie es in sich auf, fühlt es, taucht hinein und wird Teil vom Akt. Macarena zeigt mir ein Stück ihrer Heimat und führt mich in eine Welt voller Mystik.

Ich erinnere mich, wie Macarena über ihr Schaffen gesagt hat: „It's not art, it's life!“. Für mich ist ihre Arbeit ein beeindruckendes Beispiel dafür, wie beides miteinander verschmelzen kann.







Shannon on Marilyn

Lee Wen says that Marilyn Arsem's work is about weather because more than once he has seen her perform in all kinds of violent weather - wind storms and sometimes rain - great giant theatres of Mother Nature's prowess, seemingly triggered by her very presence. I think Marilyn's performances are about her hair. When she performs, she takes it down and it surrounds her body, lending her an air of vulnerability. This gesture feels very private. When weather and her hair meet, her waist-length mane swirls in the wind, and she appears very powerful.

Marilyn always says that she doesn't know what her performance is going to be before she arrives to a festival. I'm not sure I believe her. There are forces working in Marilyn that she knows about, but seldom reveals. And despite her insistence that she doesn't know what to do, she always makes the right thing. Not the perfect thing - it's not about perfect - but the right thing. Marilyn says it's going to be too hard to make work, now that Bob has died. I believe her. Everything now is what comes after, and it's hard to know where to start, especially if you never knew what you were going to do in the first place.

In her artist talk, Marilyn tells us about two performances she made many years ago, both containing the colour red as a key element, and both designed to be purposely un-documentable. The first, Red in Woods, was created for an audience of one. Each single audience member was driven to the edge of a wooded area and left there, alone. They were told to follow a path of red thread that snaked through the woods. On this trail they encountered various scenes and tableaux invoking the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood: a table with steaming hot tea and a warm meal; a young girl wearing a black cape, red hat and gloves, sitting alone on a log, peering out from behind the low branches of a tree; a bed covered with a red blanket seen in the distance in the middle of a wide expanse of field. Following the path through the woods as dusk fell the lone traveler at times felt both like Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf. Eventually they emerged from the woods unscathed, but never sure if they had been watched. Much later, the audience that experienced the work met to talk about their experiences. These stories and a few images taken by Bob comprise the "documentation", the only evidence that the work existed at all.

The other work Marilyn tells us about is titled The Red Chair. Each day before sunrise, Marilyn would take a red chair out into the landscape and sit in it, watching the sunrise. She would photograph it and leave it there for the day. The next morning, she moved the chair to a new location. Three sentences were inscribed on the chair, in Macedonian. They read: Please be seated. Here is this moment. The only time is now. Marilyn tells us that taking the photo each day was a conflict between staying in the present moment or thinking of and anticipating the future audience. What happens when you make a performance that no one sees?

It's not clear to me after the artist talk why Marilyn chose to talk about these performances in particular, until she begins her performance on the last night of the festival. She is going to make another performance about the colour red, she is going to make something that is meant to be watched from a carefully chosen location and from a particular view, and the documentation – the proof the work

existed at all - is not going to be visible until much later, next spring in fact, revealed as a straight line of red poppies, stretching into the horizon.

I was with Marilyn in the days before her performance when she didn't know what to do, and then later when she knew and was searching for a vast quantity of poppy seeds. I knew what she was going to do before she started. I felt prepared. Wearing a long red dress, with her waist length hair unfurled, and carrying a red side satchel holding thousands and thousands of poppy seeds (both a symbol for a place of burial, and as opium a powerful drug for pain), she planned to walk backwards away from the audience for 2 hours until very simply, she disappeared.

When she started her action outside, she greeted the audience, touching each person in turn, saying hello, holding a hand, and sometimes smiling. She faced us and told us to watch the performance from this exact spot. Then she said, "I have to leave now. I'm sorry, you have to stay here." With that, she began to slowly walk backwards, away from us, step by step, dropping the seeds one by one from her upturned palm into the single line in the grass as she went.

After a short time people started to chat with each other, occasionally looking back to see Marilyn's progress. The start of another performance was announced and the crowd slowly dispersed. Not to worry, you can always come back later. I waited for a few minutes because I had a strong desire to be here alone with Marilyn. She was moving very slowly, but suddenly I had the feeling that it was happening too fast. I slowly showed her the palm of my hand in a gesture to say, "I still see you", or, "Goodbye". She returned the gesture. Later when I came back to the spot, Marilyn was farther away. I could still see her red dress against the green grass and the blue sky, but I could no longer make out the details of her face. The third time her figure was so small, the outline blurry. I had a white shawl with me and I swirled it around my body, imaging that Marilyn might be able to see it and know that I was still here. I focused hard on the red dot in the distance. Then without warning, she disappeared. No thunder, no lightning. I blinked a few times. She was really gone. In that moment, I understand deeply this was a picture of what it feels like to lose great love. It's there. And then suddenly, it's gone.

When Marilyn returned to the venue a little while time later, she was wearing a black dress, her hair up. The usual Marilyn costume, but she appeared as a ghost to me. She told me she could see my white shawl from even very far way. This made me feel good in a way, knowing that the picture of loss can be seen from both shores.

On the last day of the festival, the artists were asked to make works for various locations in a local hotel. The artists scatter and take up positions in the pool, the bowling alley, a conference room, the lobby. I chose the small fitness room. In it there is a treadmill. I turned it to face the wall, my back facing the audience as they entered the room. On the wall at my eye level I wrote the word 'home' in pencil. For two hours, I walked on the treadmill, carrying two red buckets, one filled with water, the other filled with rosemary, a symbol of remembrance. I walked forward in a straight line, step by step in perfect rhythm, looking steadfastly towards home.







Gwen on Sandra

Isolated in a big empty space,
Sandra holds in her half-opened hands something I cannot see.
Absorbed and motionless in a corner of the space,
A silent, intimate dialogue sets in between her and this little thing in her hands.
The audience starts arriving, I hear voices approaching, some of them crossing the space.
Nobody seems to notice that the performance may have already begun.
Sandra advances in the space, pauses and closes her eyes and hands.
The audience settles in. For some, Sandra's presence goes practically unnoticed.
Then all of the sudden, nothing moves. Silence in the room.
And standing, with a slight rocking of the body, Sandra takes up all the space.
Her hands open, one palm extends and we see a small butterfly.
She blows gently on it then walks backwards into the space.
She recedes and I am struck by the immensity of the empty space.
The intimacy of the action disappears, the butterfly escapes and becomes invisible.
Sandra returns.
A small black pile is placed on a sheet of newspaper on the floor.
It becomes very present.
Sandra takes it in her hand, lifts it up and carries it gently as if holding something fragile, or possibly threatening.
She moves through the space with the small black pile in her hand.
Once again the intensity of this simple action commands all my attention.
The slowness and silence of the action.
In one quick movement, she throws the mass into the air.
A silent explosion into a cloud of black dust.
The space becomes tangible.
Dust lands on me, it's hard to breathe. I'm scared.
The explosion of dust has left a large black trace on the floor.
Standing in the midst of it, Sandra, barefoot, lifts her face upwards.
Is she looking for air, light, balance?
Time suspended.
The dust settles slowly, the air becomes breathable again.
She goes to get a wooden chair and places it in the black trace on the floor.
And slowly, very slowly, she bends to sit down.
My eyes follow her every movement. The smallest part of her body becomes significant, such is the tension within this body - strong, precise and extremely human.
This whole body bent forward, her hands gliding along the legs of the chair, an almost imperceptible movement, the chair and the body becoming one, a multitude of vivid images surge in my head.
A tension in the action. A tension in the space. An inner struggle.
Suddenly, with her right hands she grabs the leg of the chair and moves it quickly elsewhere.
This shift in energy momentarily relieves me.

The action with the chair is repeated several times, these slow and determined gestures followed by an outburst of action invoke a state of alertness and constant focus. My attention becomes more and more acute, I wait and watch for any visual detail with pleasure and delight.
Sandra constructs her spatial and temporal conditions in order to situate herself on the brink of absence. And then at the most unexpected moments she brings forth bursts of her mysterious physical and psychological energies.
The soles of the feet are black. The body seems to slowly fall onto the chair.
Finally balanced sitting on the chair.
Her whole body leans forward, is Sandra trying to escape again?
Her hands gently wipe the black dust from the soles of her feet. The gentleness of this action brings a brief respite from all the previous tension.
Then without warning, Sandra rises and frees herself from the grip of the chair.
She walks away.
The space regains its own existence.
Sandra does not reveal herself. She appears. Her performance is complete in holding back and bursting out.

Gwendoline Robin, Brussels, August 15, 2012
Translated by Victoria Stanton. Edited by Andrea Saemann

*Isolée dans un grand espace vide,
Sandra tient dans ses mains entre-ouvertes quelque chose que je ne vois pas.
Absorbée et immobile dans un coin de l'espace,
un dialogue silencieux, intime s'installe entre elle et cette petite chose entre ses mains. Le public va arriver, j'entends les voix qui se rapprochent, certains traversent l'espace. Personne ne semble s'apercevoir que la performance a peut-être déjà commencer. Sandra s'avance dans l'espace, s'immobilise et ferme les yeux et les mains. Le public s'installe. La présence de Sandra est presque invisible pour certains. Puis tout d'un coup, plus rien ne bouge. Silence dans la salle.
Alors debout, avec un léger balancement du corps, Sandra prend toute la présence. Ses mains s'entrouvent, une paume de main se tend et on aperçoit un petit papillon. Elle souffle doucement sur lui puis marche en arrière vers le fond de l'espace. Elle s'éloigne et l'immensité de l'espace vide prend mon regard.
L'intimité de l'action disparaît, le papillon s'échappe, il devient invisible.
Sandra revient vers nous.
Un petit tas noir est posé sur une feuille de journal au sol.
Il devient très présent.
Sandra le prend en main, le soulève et le déplace doucement comme quelque chose de fragile ou peut-être aussi quelque chose de menaçant.
Elle circule dans l'espace avec ce petit tas noir en main.
À nouveau l'intensité de l'action si simple prend toute mon attention.*

*Lenteur et silence de l'action.
D'un seul geste vif, elle lance le tas noir dans les airs.
Explosion silencieuse d'un nuage de poussière noire.
L'espace devient physique.
La poussière m'atteint, difficile à respirer. J'ai peur.
L'explosion de poussière a laissé une grande trace noire au sol.
Debout au milieu de celle-ci, Sandra, pieds nus, lève le visage vers le haut.
Cherche-t-elle l'air, la lumière, l'équilibre?
Temps suspendu.
La poussière retombe lentement, l'air redevient respirable.
Elle va chercher une chaise en bois et la place dans la trace noire au sol.
Et lentement, très lentement, tout son corps se penche pour s'y asseoir.
Mes yeux suivent tout son mouvement. La moindre partie de son corps devient impressionnante tant la tension de ce corps est forte, précise et extrêmement humaine.
Tout ce corps en penché en avant, la main droite glisse le long du pied de la chaise, mouvement presque imperceptible, la chaise et le corps ne font plus qu'un, une multitudes d'images vivantes surgissent en moi.
Tension dans l'action. Tension dans l'espace. Un combat intérieur.
Tout d'un coup, d'un geste ferme sa main attrape le pied de la chaise et la déplace vivement ailleurs.
Ce changement d'énergie me soulage un bref instant.
L'action avec la chaise est répétée plusieurs fois, ses gestes lents et déterminés puis l'éclatement de l'action créent chez moi un état d'alerte et une concentration constante.
Mon attention est de plus en plus aigüe, j'attends et regarde avec plaisir et délectation le moindre détail visuel.
Sandra construit ses conditions spatiales et temporelles pour se tenir au bord de l'absence et puis de faire surgir aux moments les plus inattendus les éclats de sa mystérieuse énergie physique et psychique.
La plante des pieds est noire. Le corps semble lentement tomber sur cette chaise.
Assise en équilibre enfin sur la chaise.
Tout son corps se penche en avant, Sandra tente-t-elle encore de s'échapper?
Ses mains essuient doucement la poussière noire de ses plantes de pieds. La douceur de cette action vient donner un bref répit à toute cette tension.
Puis subitement, Sandra se lève et se libère de l'emprise de la chaise.
Elle s'éloigne.
L'espace reprend son existence.
Sandra ne se montre pas. Elle apparaît. Sa performance est toute en réserves et en éclats.*







This following collage of images was shot on the last day of Blow! 8 in the Relaxa Hotel Bad Salzdetfurth.





Text of Alexandra Coupechoux, a workshop participant from the workshop of Marilyn Arsem, Essi Kausalainen and Gwendoline Robin at the Gymnasium Groß Ilsede

"Close your eyes and concentrate on the part of your body that I tell you."

It is quiet in the assembly hall, nobody is speaking, once in a while you can hear somebody standing up or sitting down.

Everybody listens curious to the instructions of Gwendolin Robin, a performance artist from Belgium.

She is one of eight artists who heads a workshop at the Gymnasium Groß Ilsede together with Marilyn Arsem and Essi Kausalainen in the context of the performance festival "Blow!8".

15 students get the possibility to experience how a performance is developed and where the artist get their inspiration from.

The first exercise is very important for the concentration.

We are all searching for a place in the room, some sit down, some lay down and some stay upright.

I close my eyes, we shall move our arm in a way that feels right. It's not about making a lot or really huge movements. In fact it's about totally listening to yourself and engage to yourself.

45 Minutes everybody moves arms, knees, shoulders, head and elbows with closed eyes. You lose the feeling for the time, I cannot remember when I started keeping my eyes closed or in which direction I'm just looking.

At the end everyone shows one of his movements and what he experienced. Even if it has been exhausting to concentrate on yourself for such a long time everybody feels rested, relaxed and calm.

The second part of the workshop is headed by Marilyn Arsem from the USA. In this part it's not about creating a feeling for your own body but to deal with our environment.

We receive little booklets and search for a place to sit. Marilyn asks us not to speak within the next time then we start. Going outside for five minutes, no matter where, experience everything with all senses.

I go to the bus stop, a way I walk along every day without really paying attention to it.

Back in the assembly hall we are supposed to write down all these things. Then we go a second time to care about the things we did not notice the first time.

Before we set off a third time we shall go our way in our heads and find a place which declares the most or seems to have the most energy to us.

First everybody is a little bit sceptic but after thinking about it everybody leaves. We are supposed to stay at this place and see if something changes for us.

I place myself at a bus stop without really knowing why. But the more I think about it the more I realize that I could go anywhere I wanted to go from this place. I am between school and the whole, big rest and sooner or later I have to decide for the second one.

We get a last task from Marilyn: To go back again and give back something to the place.

After a short break the third and last part of the day begins. Essi Kausalainen from Finland takes us to the woods, again nobody is talking. Slowly we walk in between the trees, everyone on his own and pay attention to everything remarkable, special or beautiful.

We all are searching for something we can show to the others. I do not have to search for a long time. An old tree catches my sight, somehow it is different. It has notches, the grooves are much deeper than at the other trees.

I wonder how long it is standing here and how old it really is.

As we meet again the presentation starts.

"Try to share your discoveries with the others without talking about it." Essi invites us. It's easier than it works really easily to show someone a feeling without saying a word. Someone just starts to walk and, another person follows and everybody knows where to go now.

There are places which normally do not attract attention, things you do not look at while going through the forest.

A normal bench with a hole in the treetops above it or an old twig in between green branches. A special grain in the bark, a plant growing everywhere or just an old tree.

Then we go back to school. Everybody seems to be a little bit tired and still concentrated but happy and even if the exercise is over everybody is hardly speaking.

In the assembly hall we have the possibility to ask some questions or to say something about our experiences.

Essi explains that she gets her inspiration from her daily life. It often happens that she has an idea while drinking a cup of tea in the morning, going outside or reading a book. This is the end of the workshop. Everybody leaves with the feeling of having experienced something unique.

On my way home I have to think about her words. Now everything around me seems to be so different, I try to have a closer look on all the things.

During the morning I realized that art is made from the apparently common, small things.

Everyone of us got closer to performance because of the exercises, now, there is a little less difference.

It really was worth it to take part. We all learned something, everyone on his own, about himself or about his environment.

Hopefully this opportunity will be offered again and this one has not been the last workshop.

Alexandra Coupechoux

Gefördert durch:



Dank an weitere Unterstützer und Sponsoren:



Thanks also to: Torsten Daniel and Dörte Hinrichs, Stefanie Pape, Rolf Jakobs, Jörg Heiss, Silke Kramer, Roi Vaara, Arty Kreimeyer and the 11th grade of the Gymnasium Groß Ilsede, Bettina Uhlig, Christoph Schmidt, Ilsede TV, Anja Ibsch, Stefan Bodwing, Fritz Lutz, Hotel Graf von Oberg, David Warzecha, Alex Liersch, Jule Schmiedler, Janina Becker .