

The background is a complex marbled paper pattern with swirling, organic shapes in various shades of grey and white. Two overlapping circles are positioned in the upper right quadrant. The top circle is white and contains the text 'Black Box teater' and 'Publication 4'. The bottom circle is black and contains the text 'Black Box teater' and 'Publication 4'. The text in both circles is white and slanted. The date 'Spring 2020' is written in a smaller font at the bottom right of each circle.

**Black Box teater  
Publication 4**

Spring 2020

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Dear reader!

By presenting a total of eight voices discussing different topics in various formats, we want to open up the possibility to explore contents related to the artistic program at Black Box teater, to artistic practices and to urgent issues from many angles.

In our previous publications, we have aimed for multifaceted topics, while this one has more of a common thread. Here, all texts provide – in their own ways – new versions and readings of our common history, bringing the possibility of invisibilized stories and narratives to be voiced.

A rather narrow range of human types began writing the interpretation of world history. Some points of view have been covered, but most perspectives are yet undescribed. This publication is a contribution to rewrite parts of the story and welcome more voices into the storytelling.

Black Box teater publication 4 presents five texts in different formats, by performing artists, authors, visual and sound artists – offering various languages and perspectives related to the artistic program of Oslo Internasjonale Teaterfestival 2020. We are very happy to share these outstanding contributions in a new and larger format.

**Black Box teater publication 4**

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*Muddy With Her Footprints* is a commissioned essay where the author Jonas Eika is investigating how he, from his position in history today, can read, understand and rewrite the history of the Early Beguines; a group of religious women who sought to live outside the patriarchy, society and the church. The text was originally written in Danish and translated into English. Both versions are published here.

**Jonas Eika** made his literary debut with the novel *Lageret Huset Marie* (Warehouse House Marie) in 2015. In 2018, he followed up with *Efter Solen* (After the Sun) for which he received the Nordic Council Literature Prize. *Efter Solen* is a genre-experimental collection of five rather long short stories about people inhabiting very different positions in global capitalism, but all affected by it on an intimate and bodily level. At the same time, the short stories point to liberatory desires and emerging communities with potentials for resistance.

This text was originally written in Danish and translated to English by Sherilyn Hellberg.

## *Mudret til af Hendes Fodspor* Et forsøg på at genskrive de tidlige beginners historie Jonas Eika

Mairie D'Oignies (1177–1213) blev gift som fjortenårig og fik overtalt sin mand til at leve kyskt. Sammen forlod de deres hjem i Nivelles, syd for Bruxelles, for at pleje spedalske på et hospital i Willambroux. Hendes rygte nåede mange andre kvinder og fik dem til at følge efter; og endnu flere hørte det ikke, men blev på omtrent samme tid grebet af en lignende ånd, en længsel efter en både ny og ældgammel måde at leve på: hengivent og fattigt som apostlene, men uden at være afsondret fra verden. Det var første gang i kristent Europa, at store grupper af kvinder begyndte at leve udenfor både kloster og ægteskab, tilhørende hverken en himmelsk eller jordisk brudgom. Snart boede de sammen i små og større bofællesskaber rundt omkring i Belgien, Holland, Flandern, og senere også Frankrig og Tyskland. De bosatte sig i udkanten af byerne, eller på brakmarker nær hospitaler og kirker, plejede de syge, underviste, vævede, smedede, dyrkede jorden og Gud og hinanden.

*Beginnerne*, er denne bevægelse senere blevet kaldt, og jeg ankom til den gennem en række af kvindelige mystikere: Simone Weil, Mechtild af Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, Hadewijch af Brabant, kvinder der alle sammen, i deres undersøgelse af sjælens vej til Gud, forestillede sig selv som noget radikalt åbent, noget som må vige pladsen for et udefrakommende begær. Den troende nærmer sig Gud, ikke gennem en viljeshandling, men ved at tømme sig selv for det, der kan kaldes *jeget*; det der gerne vil hævde sig selv, udøve sin vilje og indrette verden i sit billede. Og i samme bevægelse bliver hun så fyldt med Gud, at hun ikke kan skelnes fra ham.

Jeg skriver *ham*, fordi de pågældende mystikere selv brugte det pronomen om Gud. Og selvom det at underkaste sin vilje for en mandlig gud, ikke lyder som den mest oplagte feministiske strategi, mener jeg, at der var noget subversivt i de middelalderlige, kvindelige mystikers idé om selvtømning – eller »afskabelse,« som Simone Weil kaldte det mange år senere: »Decreation: to make something created pass into the uncreated.«<sup>1</sup> Processen havde potentialet til at bringe den troende

kvinde udenfor patriarkatets rækkevidde (mere om det senere), og til at omformulere det syn på, som kirkemagten hvilede på. Nemlig at mennesket i sin natur var syndigt, og derfor havde brug for kirken til at holde synden i skak. Mystikerne, derimod, så mennesket som åbent for påvirkninger og begær, der bringer det i affekt, bringer det ud af sig selv og transformerer det til uigenkendelighed, så det til sidst kan »blive Gud med Gud,« som Hadewijch formulerede det.<sup>2</sup>

Jeg har længe været draget mod den idé om det menneskelige selv. Både fordi den udgør en slags anarkistisk alternativ til den moderne stats ontologi – hvori det politiske subjekt er afgrænset og indesluttet i sig selv, en entitet med interesser der kan repræsenteres<sup>3</sup> – men også fordi den svarer bedre til min oplevelse af, hvad der gør mig i stand til at elske. I sande venskaber, romantiske relationer og politiske bevægelser – som ikke altid er tre adskilte sfærer – oplever jeg at blive bragt udenfor mig selv, tømt, taget i besiddelse, om end kortvarigt. En del af selvet viger tilbage eller går i opløsning, og giver plads til at noget andet, som kunne kaldes kærlighed, kan komme ind og få fylde. Al kærlighed og begær er for mig forbundet med denne erfaring af ikke at være hel, at være gennemkrydset af – og genstand for – kræfter som er udenfor mig selv. Det er også en erfaring af ikke at være mand, i binær, patriarkalsk forstand: Det mandlige subjekt som suverænt, uigennemtrængeligt og aldrig et objekt for nogen eller noget andet. Samtidig har jeg tænkt over, om min dragning mod idéen om tømning eller ødelæggelse af jeget,

1. *Gravity & Grace*, Simone Weil, Routledge Classics, 2002.

2. *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, transl. Mother Columba Hart, Paulist Press, 1981.

3. Som skriftkollektivet Tiqqun formulerer det: »In order to become a political subject in the modern State, each body must submit to the machinery that will make it such: it must begin by casting aside its passions (now inappropriate), its tastes (now laughable), its penchants (now contingent), endowing itself instead with interests, which are much more presentable and, even better, representable. In this way, in order to become a political subject each body must first carry out its own autocastration as an economic subject.« *Introduction to Civil War, Tiqqun, Semiotext(e) / Intervention Series*, 2010.

4. *Two lives of Mairie d'Ognies*, Jacques de Vitry & Thomas de Cantimpré, transl. Margot H. King & Hugh Feiss, Peregrina Publishing Co. 2002

netop hænger sammen med at jeg som cismand er blevet opdraget til at tage plads og udøve min vilje i de fleste rum? Er der et element af katarsis i det, jeg oplever og tænker på som afskabelse? Eller overser jeg, i min idealisering af afskabelsen, de forskellige betydninger og omkostninger den kan have, hvis man, for eksempel som kvinder i middelalderen, ikke havde nogen selvbestemmelse?

Mødet med beginerne er for mig et møde med de spørgsmål. Hvordan kan jeg, som mand i dag, gå i forbindelse med en religiøs kvindebevægelse fra tolvhundredetallet? Men også: Hvordan ville et politisk fællesskab, der drager radikale konsekvenser af mystikernes idéer om afskabelse, kunne se ud? Beginerne var efter alt at dømme netop sådan en bevægelse. Dette essay er et forsøg på at nå dem hen over den historiske og erfaringsmæssige afstand, der skiller mig fra dem – og på at vriste deres historie ud af hænderne på det patriarkat, som har skrevet den i deres eget billede.

De historiske kilder om den tidlige del af beginebevægelsen er få. De består primært af elleve hagiografier, det vil sige beretninger om individuelle kvinders liv, skrevet med henblik på at få dem helgenkåret. Det skaber nogle problemer for den der gerne vil forstå dem: For det første fremstår livet i de løst organiserede og mere eller mindre autonome beginefællesskaber mest som en parentes, et ophold på vejen mod et konventionelt klosterliv. For det andet er beretningerne skrevet af præster, munke og biskopper, altså af mænd som levede i et patriarkat der inddelte verden i krop og ånd, følelse og rationalitet, og gjorde »kvinden« til inkarnationen af dualismens nederste del. At lede efter den virkelige person i en helgenberetning handler, når den person var en kvinde, mest af alt om at lede efter sprækker i det mandlige blik; at læse sig gennem lag på lag af formynderi, moralisme og sublimeret mandligt begær. Og så ind imellem, under de mest søgte tolkninger og bortforklaringer, kan man ane en af hendes virkelige handlinger, lidt af det liv hun forsøgte at leve.

Sådan er det også med Mairie D'Oignies. Det meste af hendes *Vita* – hendes *Liv*, som den slags hagiografier så totalitært er betitlet – kredser om hendes fromhed, anger og ydmyghed, hvordan hun allerede fra barnsben, ja »nærmest fra livmoderen,« levede for Gud og gav afkald på verdslige ting.<sup>4</sup> Men indimellem er der også tegn på noget andet, noget overskridende. I afsnit 17 fortæller hendes skriftefader og hagiograf, Jacques de Vitry, om en skærtorsdag, hvor hun i kirken græd så højlydt over Jesu lidelse, at præsten bad hende styre sig og bede i stilhed. Da hun ikke følte sig i stand til dét, forlod hun kirken og bad i stedet til Gud om at lade præsten forstå, at det ikke stod i nogens magt at holde den slags tårer

tilbage. Inde i kirken, midt under messen, blev præsten overvældet af gråd, han stammede og hulkede, så han var ved at blive kvalt. Derefter græd Mairie både dag og nat. Hendes tårer strømmede så tungt og uafbrudt, »at kirkegulvet blev mudret til af hendes fodspor.«

Selvom synlig medfølelse hos kvinder blev tilskyndet og fejret – som et tegn på indre fromhed, en slags emotionel stigmata – så var en kvindes forstyrrelse af det maskuline domæne, som kirken var, en stærk grund til mistanke om kætteri. At Jacques alligevel inkluderer episoden – og lader den følge af et moraliserende mirakel – tyder på, at den rent faktisk har fundet sted. Desuden fremstår den som en variation over et motiv der løber gennem vitaet, og ofte kalder på forklaringer fra hans side: at Mairie var *for meget*. For meget af det, det var tilmålt hende at være.

Hun gav sig alt for ødselt hen til de askeser, som kirken tilskynede hende til. Hendes faster kom spontant, sat i gang af »besøg« fra en af hendes yndlingshelgener, og kunne vare i op til elleve dage. Nogle gange, efter at have modtaget nadveren, lå hun uden at spise i total stilhed i flere uger. Andre steder i hagiografien priser Jacques hende for at opretholde en høj arbejdsindsats på en minimal diæt – eller for at kunne arbejde og bede samtidig – men her gør fasterne hende unyttig. Hun bliver simpelthen utilgængelig for præsterne, og for de pilgrimme og lægfolk der kommer for at besøge hende. Og hvis hun ved, at de er på vej, kan hun finde på at løbe ud i skoven og gemme sig der.

Også i sin selvskade, sin »ydmygelse af kødet,« var hun for meget: En dag skar hun et stort stykke kød af sig selv og begravede det i jorden. Tidligere, da hun lige var blevet gift, havde hun haft for vane at sove sin korte nattesøvn på træplanker og med et groft reb bundet stramt om huden. Det er nogle af de få steder i vitaet, hvor Jacques gør det klart for dets modtagere – som ud over Vatikanet også talte religiøse kvinder og lægfolk – at Mairies praksis skal beundres, men ikke imiteres. Hendes selvskade er et tegn på hendes fromhed, ganske vist, men i sig selv en exces der ikke skal inspirere.

Særligt over for det ekstremt asketiske og selvskadende i datidens kvindelige religiøsitet, er det som om der åbner sig en agrund foran mig, en kløft der både er historisk og har med køn at gøre: Jeg bliver sjældent rørt ved uden at have givet en slags samtykke, jeg bliver ikke set som andres ejendom. Med enkelte, momentære undtagelser – til visse fester, på traditionelle homobarer, en pludselig hånd i mine bukser, en tunge i min mund, en befaling<sup>5</sup> – har jeg som cismand altid haft en grundlæggende selvbestemmelse. Jeg har aldrig oplevet ikke at have magten over min egen krop, sådan som kvinder gør i dag, når de bliver

udsat for vold og overgreb, eller som kvinder gjorde i middelalderen, når de blev tvangsgift, sat i kloster eller mistænkt for kætteri. Deres kroppe var altid potentielt nogle andres, og samtidig det eneste de ejede. Det må være en præmis for at forstå deres selvskade, deres lange faster og vågenætter, deres ekstatiske visioner: at kroppen var det eneste materiale, de havde at arbejde med. Og hvis de ikke tog det i egen hånd, ville mænd højst sandsynlig gøre det.

Som kvinde var Mairie i kirkens øjne ren krop og syndig, prisgivet sine behov og begær. Hun var på mange måder nødt til at overkomme sin krop for at blive set som from, og for at kunne leve et liv udenfor både klosteret og det reproduktive ægteskab. Med det in mente er det nærliggende at tolke hendes selvskade enten som en slags internaliseret misogyni, eller som noget planlagt, som en performance der skal overbevise Jacques og de andre gejstlige om hendes hellighed. Men begge muligheder virker utilstrækkelige. De peger i retning af en kvindelig spiritualitet, der højst kan være et aftryk, et negativ af det patriarkat, den udspillede sig indenfor.

Desuden er der ikke noget i de historiske kilder der tyder på, at datidens voldsomt asketiske og til tider selvskadende religiøsitet var strategisk. Tværtimod finder man i de få overleverede tekster, som er skrevet af kvinder der i løbet af tolvhundretallet levede som beginer, et intenst forsøg på at blive ét med Gud gennem en vold som er rettet mod dem selv. I *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, en slags instruktionsmanual til mystisk forening, beskrev Marguerite Porete<sup>6</sup> de syv stadier, som sjælen

5. Gad vide, om den voldtægtskultur der findes også i homomiljøer – det store antal homoseksuelle mænd der bliver voldtaget af andre mænd – først og fremmest har at gøre med det gamle, freudianske paradigme: bøsser som kvindelige sjæle i mandekroppe? Og i den forstand egentlig er en form for misogyni? Er en vis feminisering, en kvindegørelse, nødvendig for ethvert overgreb?
6. Marguerite Porete levede med al sandsynlighed som begine i slutningen af det 13. århundrede. Hun var hverken gift eller i kloster, men vandrede omkring fra sted til sted. På et tidspunkt mellem 1296 og 1306 blev hendes bog, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, dømt kættersk, og hun selv blev beordret til aldrig at sprede bogen eller sine idéer igen. Det overholdte hun dog ikke. I 1308, formentlig efter at have overleveret bogen til biskoppen af Châlons-en-Champagne, blev hun fængslet og ført for inkvisitionen. I to år nægtede hun at tale med sine inkvisitorer, nægtede at aflægge ed så de kunne afhøre hende. Den 1. juni 1310 blev hun brændt på bålet i Paris.

må gå igennem for at overkomme arvesynden og blive ét med Gud. I det første stadie bliver sjælen berørt af nåden og fyldt med ønsket om at gøre Guds vilje. Men for at kunne gøre dét, bliver den nødt til at løsrive sig fra sin egen. Den må gennemgå en afvikling eller tømning af selvet, som i det tredje stadie antager en fysisk og voldelig form:

»One must crush oneself, hacking and hewing away at oneself to widen the place in which Love will want to be.«<sup>7</sup>

Selvskaden, uanset om den så skal forstås bogstaveligt eller figurativt, er altså nødvendig for en indre transformation. Den er motiveret af nåden, men skaber plads i selvet til at noget andet, nemlig kærlighed, kan komme ind og få fylde. Den rømmer pladsen for en ny subjektivitet: et selv, der ikke er autonomt eller selvomsuttende, men åbent for større kræfter.

Selvødelæggelsen er ikke først og fremmest en strategi, en metode til verdslig frigørelse; de to hænger snarere sammen på en anden måde: For at kunne ødelægge sit selv, bliver man nødt til at have en vis selvbestemmelse. Man bliver nødt til at have et selv at ødelægge. Som den franske mystiker og filosof Simone Weil skrev mere end sekshundrede år efter Marguerite Porete:

»We possess nothing in the world—a mere chance can strip us of everything—except the power to say ‘I’. That is what we have to give to God—in other words, to destroy.«<sup>8</sup>

Men i den europæiske middelalder besad kvinder ikke magten til at sige ’jeg’ – i hvert fald ikke med nogen særlig vægt over for fædre, ægtemænd eller kirkeautoriteter. Hvis en kvinde dengang nægtede at blive gift, var det for at gemme sig til en mandlig Gud, til sin »himelske brudgom.«<sup>9</sup> Hun var enten henvist til hjemmet, under en faders eller ægtemands autoritet, eller underlagt kirken gennem klosterregler der foreskrev, at nonner skulle være totalt afsondrede fra verden. Mairie D’Oignies begyndte at gøre skade på sig selv, »fordi hun tydeligvis ikke havde magt over sin egen krop.« Sådan skriver Jacques de Vitry, og mener nok at hun ikke kunne styre sit begær, men hans ord kommer til at benævne noget andet og mere sandt: at hendes krop tilhørte en mand.

7. *Marguerite Porete: The Mirror of Simple Souls*, transl. Ellen Babinsky, Paulist Press International U.S., 1993

8. *Gravity and Grace*, Simone Weil, Routledge 1952.

9. *Two Lives of Mairie D’Oignies*

Hun var lige blevet gift, men havde endnu ikke overtalt sin ægtemand til, at de skulle leve kyskt. Set i det lys, bør hendes selvunderkastelse måske også forstås som en måde at genvinde retten over hendes egen krop. En underkastelse *af* sig selv, *for* sig selv.

Er det ikke sådan med selvskaden? Kan den ikke være en måde på én gang at ødelægge og tage magt over sig selv? Sådan har jeg i hvert fald selv oplevet den, både inde og udefra – når jeg har været så fuld af skam og sorg, at jeg ikke vidste, hvad jeg ellers skulle gribe til, eller når jeg har været tæt på en anden, der gjorde det – som en indelukket og selvtilstrækkelig aktivitet, et loop der lukker alt andet ude. I Mairies tilfælde de mænd, hun var underlagt, og hvis autoritet hun var nødt til at omgås varsomt for ikke at blive set som kættersk eller stå totalt uden beskyttelse. Først var det hendes ægtemand, senere Jacques og de andre præster i Oignies, og så de mange pilgrimme og rigmænd der kom og ville have noget af hende: et råd, en bøn, en uddrivelse.

En hypotese: Den asketiske og selvskadende religiøsitet, der indimellem skinner igennem i Mairies og de andre ti hagiografier, udgjorde en trussel mod patriarkatet, fordi den på én gang udfordrede mandlig autoritet og gjorde den religiøse kvinde utilgængelig for mænd; fordi den både tog form af angreb (selvfrembragte stigmata; de mudrede fodspor på kirkegulvet) og tilbagetrækning, ud i skoven, ind i bofællesskaberne, eller ind i de lange, tavse faster der gjorde kvinderne unyttige. Og under det hele var der en indre transformation i gang; en bliven-intet som også er en bliven-Gud, eftersom Gud indtager den plads, selvet har efterladt. Med Marguerite Poretas ord, i det sjette stadie:

»This Soul, thus pure and illumined, sees neither God nor herself, but God sees himself of himself in her, for her, without her...«

Men når sjælen sidder i en kvinde, i et patriarkat så strengt som det der herskede i det 13. århundredes Europa, fører ødelæggelsen af selvet ikke nødvendigvis til frigørelse, men kan også tage form af selvudslettelse. »Fordi hun ikke kunne holde ud at være i selskab med de mænd, hvis hengivelse jævnlige tilskyndede dem til at besøge hende,« skriver Jacques, forlod Mairie i 1207 hospitalet i Willambroux og rejste til Oignies. Der levede hun som eneboerske, i nær tilknytning til det lokale augustinerkloster. Det var muligvis for at få ro, for ikke konstant at skulle forhandle sin position over for kirken, men også en kapitulation, et dødsprojekt. Allerede ved sin ankomst forudsagde Mairie, at hun skulle dø i Oignies, og udpegede for Jacques det sted i kirken, hvor hendes lig ville blive begravet. I de følgende år bad, vågede og fastede hun i en mere og mere manisk rytme, indtil hun ikke var i stand til at gøre meget andet. I de sidste ti kapitler af hendes *Liv* beskriver Jacques,

hvordan hun går sin selvprofeterede død i møde, hvordan hun kalder på den og får den til at ankomme: Gennem mange dages uafbrudt sang, bøn og halvt visionære halvt rablende bibeludlægnings, og siden i stilhed og uafbrudt faste. Liggende i en seng, der blev stillet op midt i kirken, og siden under åben himmel, spiste hun intet i treoghalvtreds dage, sygnede hen, blev bevidstløs og åndede ud.

Mairie forsvinder her. Først bliver hun sløret af Jacques' blik, der får hendes langtrukne død til at fremtræde som en festlig udfrielse fra kødet, hendes magre lemmer som relikvier, hendes dødsdag som en bryllupsdag. Og så bliver hun utilgængelig for mig, som hun blev det for dem der omgav hende, hun synker ind i sig selv og bliver umælende.

Der er en lidelse her, jeg ikke forstår. Det virker måske oplagt at se hendes død som hendes sidste oprør – eller hendes sidste underkastelse – men jeg føler mig ikke i stand til at tolke den. Jeg kender leden ved mad, lysten til ikke at indtage noget, men for mig varer den højst nogle dage og er ikke til at skelne fra lysten til at være mindre, mindre *mand*. Leden ved at bebo et køn, der altid søger at mætte sit begær, at indoptage verden i sit billede. (Et grundlæggende træk ved det mandlige blik, som viser sig i hagiografierne: den komplet manglende evne til at begribe det fravendte. Tilbøjeligheden til at forstå selv det, som er vendt væk fra en, særligt den fravendte kvinde, som en henvendelse. Selv når hun er udenfor sig selv eller bevidstløs, selv når hun er død, afgiver hun betydning.)

Stadig denne fornemmelse af, at mine forsøg på at tømme mig selv, sker fra en position af overskud og autonomi. At min lyst til at ødelægge mit selvomsuttende og viljestærke selv også er et opgør med den position, jeg er blevet forsøgt kønnet til at indtage. Men er det ikke også muligt, at det autonome og uigennemtrængelige subjekt – som indtager en så central plads i den antropocentriske, misogyne vestlige kultur – i virkeligheden er et subjekt skabt i mandens billede? Og i den forstand ikke værd at stræbe efter for nogen?

Den tanke gør det også nødvendigt at insistere på, at den selvødelæggende spiritualitet, som Mairie og hendes samtidige praktiserede, rummede et muligt frigørelsesprojekt; at den ikke havde behøvet at ende i selvudslettelse, men kunne have ført til nye måder at leve på. Før hun flyttede til Oignies og begyndte at dø, boede Mairie i femten år nær hospitalet i Willambroux, omgivet af en kreds af kvinder, der var hendes nære fortrolige. Jacques skriver kun lidt om denne periode i hendes liv, hvilket giver mig lyst til at forestille mig ting: At de levede separatistisk,

drog omsorg for hinanden og skabte strukturerne for, at de kunne give sig hen til deres askeser, ekstaser og visioner. At de læste og skrev og underviste hinanden, mens de arbejdede på at forøge deres styrke: dyrkede jorden, holdte dyr, byggede huse, forsøgte at gøre sig selvforsynende, så de heller ikke materielt ville have brug for patriarkatet. Det var på denne tid, fra cirka 1190–1225, at beginebevægelsen opstod og havde sin første, uformelle fase.<sup>10</sup> Mairie D'Oignies er tidligere blevet regnet som en slags grundlægger, men i dag er de fleste historikere enige om, at bevægelsen opstod spontant og uden nogen samlende figur: Små fællesskaber af kvinder, der søgte nogenlunde det samme – og ofte forlod forældre, ægtemænd eller børn for at finde det – opstod flere forskellige steder i Nederlandene inden for ganske kort tid. Der var ingen ordensregler eller central koordinering. Kvinderne organiserede sig i små, nonhierarkiske kollektiver med fælles ejendomsret og i fri udveksling med hinanden, i en slags anarko-kommunisme, kort sagt. De fleste arbejdede, for eksempel med tekstil og med at dyrke jorden, eller som sygeplejersker og lærere. På den måde var de i stand til selv at understøtte det tilbagetrukne, kontemplative liv, der synes at have været så vigtigt for dem, men kom samtidig til at spille en aktiv og meget synlig rolle i det sociale liv. De blev en slags tærskelfigurer, der kunne krydse frem og tilbage over grænsen mellem den religiøse og den verdslige sfære, i løbet af et liv eller en dag: være begine og kysk i nogen tid og så blive gift, eller omvendt; vandre fra deres huse, som ofte lå i udkanten af byen, ind til kirken og tilbage igen; arbejde i byen eller marken om dagen for at trække sig tilbage til bøn, læsning og meditation om aftenen.

Denne grænsekrydsning kom hurtigt til at udgøre et problem for magthaverne. Omkring år 1230 begyndte de lokale og regionale herskere – i tæt samarbejde med kirken og forskellige religiøse ordner, særligt dominikanerne – at samle beginerne i store, indmurede bygningskomplekser, såkaldte gård-beguinaer, der bestod af lejligheder og

10. Min gennemgang af beginebevægelsens historie hviler primært på: *Cities of Ladies – Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565*, Walter Simons, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

værksteder arrangeret omkring en centralt beliggende kirke. Komplekserne udgjorde en slags by i byen, der kunne bo op til femtuhundrede. Og de blev legitimeret i et sprog, der mest af alt minder om den måde, hvorpå nationalstater i dag legitimerer diskriminerende lovgivning, øget politimagt og generel undtagelsestilstand: som en nødvendig beskyttelse imod en trussel. I flere af stiftelsesbrevene for 1200-tallets gård-beguinager proklamerer de gejstlige og verdslige autoriteter, at de vil beskytte de lokale beginer mod den fare for seksuelle overgreb, som er forbundet med at vandre forbi markedspladser, torve og herberger, når de skal ind til kirken og tilbage til deres huse.<sup>11</sup> Det får mig til at tænke på, om ikke slægtskabet imellem patriarkatet og den moderne stat findes netop *déri*: at de begge legitimerer deres eksistens som en beskyttelse mod en trussel, som de selv skaber i deres indre. Staten gør det gennem undtagelsestilstanden, patriarkatet gennem seksuel vold. Og for at kunne give truslen udseende af et vilkår, en naturlov, har både staten og patriarkatet brug for forestillingen om en iboende syndighed i henholdsvis mennesket og kvinden. Kristendommen leverer den i form af arvesynden, en byrde som middelalderens kvinder bar den tungeste del af: På grund af syndefaldsmyten blev de set som årsagen til den, og i middelalderens nyplatoniske verdensbillede som ren krop og begær, årsagen til alskens synd, også ofte når de selv blev udsat for seksuelle overgreb (den skyld, som ofre for seksuelle overgreb nogle gange tilskrives, også i dag, kan med rette kaldes middelalderlig).

11. For eksempel skrev sognepræsten i Tongeren, sammen med de dominikanerne der assisterede ham, om motiverne for opførelsen af et gård-beguinage i 1245: »Since devout maidens commonly called beguines chose and acquired houses for them in our parish of Tongeren, outside the gate known as the "hospital gate," in order to pursue more peacefully the contemplation of the divine and to be further removed from the disorder and clamor of lay people, we wish to grant them that just peace. Therefore, so as not to allow the opportunity or reason for them to run about and err, which might result from attending parish churches in the city, especially because they live so far away from these churches that they must pass market squares and streets and even by inns, and because on high feasts they find themselves submerged by crowds of the populace in the main church of Tongeren, where they might eagerly observe these people while being dangerously exposed to them (...)« (Simons, *Cities of Ladies*)

I virkeligheden var patriarkatets problem med beginerne ikke, at de var kvinder, der vandrede frit omkring i byen, men at de ikke længere kunne identificeres som sådan. Som den franciskanske teolog Gilbert de Tournai skrev i et brev til paven:

»There are among us women whom we have no idea what to call, ordinary women or nuns, because they live neither in the world nor out of it.«<sup>12</sup>

Beginerne brød, i selve deres måde at leve på, med de kategorier, som patriarkatet brugte til at identificere et kvindeliv: verdsligt (*i* verden, under en faders eller ægtemands autoritet) eller religiøst (udenfor verden, under Guds autoritet via klosterreglerne). Et begineliv var ingen af delene, *hverken eller*; det kunne ikke identificeres. Ved at undslippe binariteten *verdslig/religiøs*, slap beginerne for en tid ud af kategorien »kvinde«, som den var defineret af patriarkatet, og tilegnede sig magten til at definere sig selv. De historiske kilder fortæller ikke noget om, hvordan de gjorde det; blot at der – ligesom hinsides enhver binaritet – opstod et væld af muligheder: mange måder at bo og leve på, i store og små kollektiver, mange slags håndværk at udføre, helgener at tilbede, mandlige såvel som kvindelige, Jomfru Maria som en brud, Jesus som mor, ammende gennem sit åbne sår, der rykkede nærmere og nærmere brystet.<sup>13</sup>

Jeg tror, at det var beginernes mulighed for selvbestemmelse, deres glimtvisse magt til definere sig selv eller lade være, som patriarkatet ikke kunne tolerere. Det var derfor, de blev samlet i store bygningskomplekser. Deres daglige ruter blev optegnet ad de veje og gangstier der løb igennem, altid langs en mur eller på tværs i et kors. I modsætning til nonner havde de lov at forlade komplekset i løbet af dagen, men nu var alle livets aktiviteter samlet på ét sted, så de havde ikke nogen grund til det. Der blev indført officielle regler, udpeget en overfrue og tilknyttet en skriftefader, som alle beboerne skulle bekende sig til. Det var en

12. *Gender and the Medieval Beguines*, Abby Stoner: [www2.kenyon.edu/projects/margin/beguine1.htm](http://www2.kenyon.edu/projects/margin/beguine1.htm)

13. Særligt Caroline Walker Bynum har skrevet grundigt og indsigtfuldt om den mangfoldige – og ofte ret queer – kvindelige spiritualitet i højmiddelalderen. Se blandt andet: *Jesus as Mother – Studie in the spirituality of the high middle ages*, University of California Press, 1984, og *Holy Feast and Holy Fast – the religious significance of food to medieval women*, University of California Press, 1988.

måde at gøre beginerne overskuelige på, så de igen kunne kontrolleres for ortodoksi. Ellers ville det ikke være til at sige, hvad de lavede i deres huse om aftenen, hvad de lærte hinanden og dem de underviste, hvilken teologi de nåede frem til, hvilken viden de delte og hvordan. Når en livsform sammenstyrter de eksisterende identitetskategorier, når kroppene ikke længere svarer til deres prædikater, åbnes et rum, hvor deres handlinger, tanker og omgangsformer ikke kan kontrolleres – og hvor kroppene selv ikke kan identificeres. Her til sidst, et forsøg på at få beginerne i tale:

*Begine. De fleste siger det blot om religiøse kvinder der ikke er klosterbundne, andre med henvisning til vores gråbrune klæder der ikke er bleget eller indfarvet med noget. Men nogle har sagt mig, at det er beslægtet med ordet Albigensis, altså Albi, den fordærvede by i det sydfranske, hvor det store kætteri havde sit udspring. Og andre endnu, at det betyder en der stammer, mumler, taler utydeligt, som faldet hen i sin egen bøn, en bøn så egen at den ikke kan lyttes af. Og dét tror jeg er den rette betydning, for de lærde mistænker os altid for vores sprog. At vi læser ulærd i skriften og tolker forkert, at vi siger ét og mumler noget andet, en gang blev vi afbilledet med udstående, ravgule øjne og todelt tunge. Det var ikke her, men på vores søstres hus på den anden side af floden, og over tegningen stod det skrevet: Begine. Og alligevel er nogle af os begyndt at tage navnet til sig. Det er dem der køber ejendom, kalder deres hjem for et beguinage og udpeger en magistra, en frue, et overhoved, i samarbejde med en præst eller prior. Jeg ved, at Clarisse også ind imellem opfører sig som overhoved her, men det har aldrig været meningen. Det var meningen, vi skulle leve i et fælles afkald på magt: den der kommer af at eje, og den det er at kunne sige jeg, at udøve sin vilje, bestemme over andre. Jeg troede, at den sidste ville forsvinde med den første. Jeg forstår godt, at visheden om de mistanker der omgiver os, gør Clarisse bange og får hende til at værne om det, som de andre siger vi er. Men er vi overhovedet beginer? Er vi ikke bare kvinder der lever sammen i fattigdom, af vore afgrøder og vore hænders arbejde? Er vi ikke bare jordbrugere, læger, lærere, væversker og smede? Knoklede vi ikke på vores fædrene gård, gik vi ikke i stå i marken, mærkede de kornbrune vidder trække selvet fra hinanden og vidste: Vi kunne blive så fyldt med Gud, at der ikke ville være andet tilbage? Og tog vi da ikke til byen for at finde hinanden? Eller for at finde underhold i kyskhed, da storbonden opkøbte jorden og ville have os*

*med i købet? Eller var vi allerede i byen og fandt hinanden gennem ømheden i vores hænder? Holder vi ikke vores tidebønner morgen, middag og aften, og gør tiden derimellem til en uafbrudt bøn? Og glemmer vi dem ikke, hvis Jesu sår suger os til sig, hvis han beder os om at drikke eller stikke en finger derind? Tænker vi ikke på ham, hvis det er ham vi elsker mest? Eller på Jomfruen, hvis det er hende? Rækker hun os ikke sit barn, som en mor giver sin søn til en barnepige, og tager vi så ikke imod og kysser dets ansigt, som om vi spiste frugt? Og lader vi os ikke vie til hende, hvis det er det, hun vil med os? Kender vi ikke vores begær, og følger vi ikke den vej, som får det til at vokse, til det også overstiger os? Er det ikke sådan? Er vi ikke mange?*

*Muddy With Her Footprints*  
On Rewriting the History of the Early Beguines  
Jonas Eika

Mairie D'Oignies (1177–1213) was married at fourteen and convinced her husband to be celibate. Together they left their home in Nivelles—south of Bruxelles—to take care of lepers in a hospital in Willambroux. Word of her reached many women and they followed her, and even more hadn't heard but around the same time were taken by a similar spirit, a desire to live in a new and ancient way: poor and devoted like the apostles, but still connected to the world. It was the first time in Christian Europe that large groups of women began to live outside marriage and the cloister, belonging to neither a divine nor earthly husband. Soon they were living in communities small and large in Belgium, Holland, and Flanders, and then in France and Germany too. They settled on the outskirts of cities and in the fields near hospitals and churches, caring for the sick, working as teachers, weavers, and blacksmiths, tending to the land and God and each other.

The *Beguines*, the movement was later called, and I came to them through a line of female mystics — Simone Weil, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, Hadewijch of Brabant — women who all, in their understanding of the soul's path to God, imagined the self as radically open, something that could give way to an external desire. The believer approaches God not by an act of will, but rather by emptying herself of the “I”: that force which longs to assert itself, to exercise its own will and arrange the world in its image. And in the same movement she becomes so full with God that she cannot be distinguished from him.

I write “him” because this is the pronoun they used for God. And even though submitting one's will to a male god may not seem a particularly feminist strategy, I would argue that there is something subversive about the medieval female mystic's notion of emptying the self, or “decreation,” as Simone Weil put it many years later: “to make something created pass into the uncreated.”<sup>1</sup> It had the potential to take the believing woman where the patriarchal order couldn't reach her

(more on this later), and to rework the image on which the power of the church rested: that humans were sinful by nature and required the church to keep them in check. The mystics, however, saw the human as open to influence and desire that could take them out of themselves and change them beyond recognition, so that they might eventually “become God with God,” in Hadewijch’s words.<sup>2</sup>

I’ve long been drawn to this idea of the human self, both as an anarchist alternative to the ontology of the modern nation state—in which the political subject is a limited and coherent entity with representable interests—and also because it aligns better with my own experience of what makes love possible. In close friendships, romantic relationships, and political engagements<sup>3</sup>—spheres that sometimes overlap—I am sometimes taken outside of myself, emptied and taken hold of, even if only briefly. Part of my self recedes or dissolves and makes room for something that might be called love to enter. For me, all love and desire is bound to this feeling of not being whole, of being traversed by—and subject to—forces external to myself. It’s also a feeling of not being a man, at least in binary, patriarchal terms, where the male subject is seen as sovereign, impenetrable, never the object of someone or something else. But I’ve also wondered whether my attraction to the idea of emptying or destroying the self has to do with the fact that I as a cis-man have been socialized to take up space and exercise my will in most spaces. Is there some element of catharsis in my experience and idea of decreation? Or am I, in my idealization, overlooking the different meanings and implications it might have if one, like a woman during the middle ages, doesn’t have any kind of autonomy?

My encounter with the beguines is also an encounter with these questions: How can I, as a man today, connect with a religious wom-

1. *Gravity & Grace*, Simone Weil, Routledge Classics, 2002.
2. *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, transl. Mother Columba Hart, Paulist Press, 1981.
3. As the writing collective Tiqqun puts it: “In order to become a political subject in the modern State, each body must submit to the machinery that will make it such: it must begin by casting aside its passions (now inappropriate), its tastes (now laughable), its penchants (now contingent), endowing itself instead with interests, which are much more presentable and, even better, representable. In this way, in order to become a political subject each body must first carry out its own autocastration as an economic subject.” *Introduction to Civil War*, Tiqqun, Semiotext(e) / Intervention Series, 2010.

an’s movement from the 13<sup>th</sup> century? And also: how might a political community informed by the radical notion of decreation look? The beguines were by all accounts trying figure out exactly this. This essay is an attempt to reach them across the historical and experiential distance that separates me from them—and to wrest their history out of the hands of the patriarchy that has written it in its own image.

There are few historical records of the early beguines. These consist primarily of eleven hagiographies: biographical accounts of the lives of individual women written with the intention of having them canonized. This creates a few problems for someone trying to understand them. First, because life in the loosely organized, more or less autonomous beguine communities often appears as a parentheses, a stop on the road to a more conventional monastic life. Second, because these accounts are written by priests, monks, and bishops, which is to say men who lived in a patriarchal society that divided the world into body and spirit, feeling and rationality, and declared women the incarnation of the basest of these dualisms. Locating the actual person in a hagiography is a matter of searching for cracks in the male gaze, sifting through layer after layer of paternalism, morality, and sublimated male desire. But occasionally, underneath the most far-fetched interpretations and justifications, you can make out one of her real actions, a little bit of the life she tried to live.

This is also the case with Mairie D’Oignies. The majority of her *Vita*—her *Life*, as this kind of hagiography is so despotically entitled—revolves around her piety, repentance, and humility, how she, even as a child, indeed “almost from the womb,” lived for God, renouncing all worldly things.<sup>4</sup> But once in a while, there are signs of something else, something excessive. In paragraph 17, her confessor and hagiographer, Jacques de Vitry, recounts a Maundy Thursday mass during which she cried so loudly at Jesus’s suffering that the priest asked her to get a hold of herself and pray in silence. Since she did not feel capable of that, she left the church and prayed to God to let the priest understand that no one had the power to restrain such tears. Back in the church, in the middle of the mass, the priest was overcome by tears; he sobbed and stuttered, almost choking. And then Mairie cried day and night. Her tears

4. *Two lives of Mairie d’Oignies*, Jacques de Vitry & Thomas de Cantimpré, transl. Margot H. King & Hugh Feiss, Peregrina Publishing Co. 2002

streamed, so heavy and unceasing “that the ground in the church became muddy with her footprints.”

Although expressions of compassion by women were encouraged and celebrated — as a sign of inner piety, a kind of emotional stigmata — a woman’s disruption of a masculine domain, such as the church, was strong evidence of heresy. That Jacques includes this episode nevertheless — followed by a moralizing miracle — suggests that it really happened. It appears, moreover, to be a variation on a theme that runs through the *Vita*, often requiring justifications on his part: that Mairie was *too much*. Too much of what she was she was supposed to be.

She gave herself too extravagantly to the asceticism encouraged by the church. Her fasts were spontaneous, inspired by “visitations” from one of her favored saints, and could last up to eleven days. Sometimes, after receiving communion, she would remain in her bed in silence, not eating for weeks at a time. At other points in the hagiography, Jacques praises her for maintaining a high work ethic on a minimal diet—and for her ability to work and pray at once—but here, fasting makes her useless. She becomes inaccessible to the priests and to the pilgrims and laypeople who come to see her. And if she knows they are coming, she might run into the forest to hide.

Her acts of her self-harm—her “humiliation(s) of the flesh”—were also too much: one day, she sliced off a large piece of her own flesh and buried it in the ground. Earlier, when she had just been married, she would spend her brief nights of sleep on wooden planks with a coarse rope bound tightly around her. This is one of the few places in the *Vita* where Jacques makes clear to his readers—which included not only the Vatican but also religious women and laypeople—that Mairie’s practice was to be admired, but not imitated. Her acts of self-harm were a sign of her piety, but also an excess not to be emulated.

Especially when confronted with the extreme asceticism and self-mutilation of this period’s religious women, it is like an abyss opens in front of me, a chasm of history and gender: I am rarely touched without giving some form of consent; I am not seen as others’ property. With few, momentary exceptions—at certain parties, certain gay bars, a sudden hand in my pants, a tongue in my mouth, a command<sup>5</sup>—I have always, as a cis-man, had a foundational autonomy. I have never felt that I didn’t have power over my own body in the way that women today do when they are victims of assault, or women in the middle ages, who were forced to marry, sent to a convent, and suspected of heresy. Their bodies always potentially belonged to someone else, and yet they were all that

they had. This is essential to understanding their acts of self-harm, their long fasts and vigils, their ecstatic visions: that the body was the only material they had to work with. And if they didn’t take it into their own hands, then men most likely would.

As a woman, Mairie was pure body and sinful in the eyes of the church, at the mercy of her own needs and desires. In many ways, she needed to overcome her body to be seen as pious, and to be able to live a life outside both the cloister and reproductive marriage. With this in mind, it can be tempting to interpret her self-harm as either a kind of internalized misogyny or planned performance, something that would convince Jacques and the other clergy members of her holiness. But both of these readings seem insufficient. They suggest a form of female spirituality that was at most an imprint, a photo-negative, of the patriarchy that surrounded it.

There is, moreover, nothing in the historical records to suggest that the violently ascetic and at times self-mutilating religiosity of these women was strategic. In fact, the few surviving texts written by the 13<sup>th</sup> century beguines bear witness to an intense attempt to become one with God through a kind of self-directed violence. In *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, a kind of manual to achieve mystical union, Marguerite Porete<sup>6</sup> describes the seven stages the soul must pass to overcome original sin and become one with God. In the first stage, the soul is touched by grace

5. I wonder whether the rape culture that also exists in gay environments—the large number of homosexual men raped by other men—can be linked to the old, Freudian paradigm of gay men as womanly souls trapped in male bodies. And whether this might also be seen as a form of misogyny: is a certain degree of feminization, or ascription of womanhood, inherent to every form of assault or harassment?
6. Marguerite Porete likely lived as a beguine at the end of the 13th century. She was neither married nor part of a convent, and instead wandered from place to place. At some point between 1296 and 1305, her book, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, was declared a work of heresy, and the circulation of the book and ideas was banned, an order she did not respect. In 1308, probably after having delivered a copy of the book to the Bishop of Châlons-en-Champagne, Marguerite was imprisoned and summoned to be tried for heresy. For two years she refused to speak with her inquisitors and refused to take the oaths necessary to question her. On June 1st, 1310, she was burned at the stake in Paris.

and filled with the desire to exercise God's will. But in order to do so, it must detach from its own will; it must dismantle or empty the self, a process that becomes physical and violent in the third stage: "One must crush oneself, hacking and hewing away at oneself to widen the place in which Love will want to be."<sup>7</sup>

Self-harm, taken literally or figuratively, is in fact a necessary part of inner transformation. Motivated by grace, it creates an opening in the self for something else, namely love, to enter and take shape. It vacates this space for a new subjectivity: a self neither autonomous nor self-contained, but rather open to greater forces.

Self-annihilation is not, first and foremost, a strategy, a means of worldly liberation; the relationship between the two is different: to destroy the self, one must have a certain level of autonomy, a self to destroy. As the French mystic and philosopher, Simone Weil, wrote more than six hundred years after Marguerite Porete, "We possess nothing in the world—a mere chance can strip us of everything—except the power to say 'I'. That is what we have to give to God—in other words, to destroy."<sup>8</sup>

In medieval Europe, however, women did not have the power to say "I"—at least not in a way that bore weight against their brothers, husbands, or the church. If a woman refused to be married, it was to save herself for a male God, her "heavenly bridegroom."<sup>9</sup> She was either to remain in the home, subject to the authority of a father or husband, or be subject to the church under monastic rule, which demanded that nuns be completely isolated from the world. Mairie D'Oignies began to harm herself "because she clearly did not have power over her own body." That's how Jacques de Vitry puts it, who probably meant that she couldn't control her desire, but his words suggest something else, perhaps truer: that her body belonged to a man. She had just been married, but hadn't yet convinced her husband to be celibate. Her self-subjugation might therefore be seen as a way of reclaiming her right to her body. A subjugation *of* herself *for* herself.

7. *Marguerite Porete: The Mirror of Simple Souls*, transl. Ellen Babinsky, Paulist Press International U.S., 1993
8. *Gravity and Grace*, Simone Weil, Routledge 1952.
9. *Two Lives of Mairie D'Oignies*

Is this also the case of self-harm in general? Might it also be a way of simultaneously destroying and claiming power over oneself? That is, in any case, how I have experienced it, from both the inside and outside — when I've been so full of grief or shame that I didn't know what else to do, or when I've been close to someone who hurt themselves: an enclosed, self-sufficient activity, a loop that shuts out everything else. In Mairie's case, the men to whom she was beholden, whose authority she had to circumvent not to be seen as a heretic or completely without protection. First her husband, and then later Jacques and the other priests of Oignies, and then all the pilgrims and wealthy men who came to claim something from her: counsel, a prayer, an exorcism.

A thought: the ascetic and self-mutilating religiosity that occasionally shines through the hagiographies of Marie and the other ten women constituted a threat to the patriarchy because it simultaneously challenged masculine authority and made the religious woman inaccessible to men, taking both the form of attack (self-generated stigmata, the muddy footprints on the church floor) and withdrawal, into the forest, into the commune, into the long, silent fasts that rendered these women useless. And beneath it all an inner transformation was taking place: a becoming-nothing that is also a becoming-God, insofar as God might fill the space the self has left behind. In Marguerite Porete's words, in the sixth stage: "This Soul, thus pure and illumined, sees neither God nor herself, but God sees himself of himself in her, for her, without her ..."

But when the soul lives within a woman who herself lives within a patriarchal system as dominant and pervasive as it was in 13<sup>th</sup> century Europe, self-annihilation does not necessarily lead to liberation, but can also take the form of self-effacement. "Because she could not endure the company of the men whose devotion frequently impelled them to visit her," writes Jacques, Mairie left the hospital in Willambroux in 1207 and traveled to Oignies, where she lived as a hermit in close contact with a local Augustinian cloister. This was likely to find peace and quiet, not constantly to have to negotiate her position with the church, but it was also a capitulation, a preparation for death. On her arrival, Mairie already predicted she would die in Oignies, and told Jacques exactly where in the church her body should be buried. Over the following years, she prayed, held vigils, and fasted in increasingly manic rhythms, until she was no longer capable of much else. In the last ten chapters of the *Vita*, Jacques describes how she embraces her self-prophesied death, how she called on it, made it arrive: many days of uninterrupted hymns, prayers, and half-visionary, half-rambling biblical interpretations, and then, silence and unbroken fasting. Lying in the bed that had been

placed in the middle of the church, and then, under the open sky, she ate nothing for fifty-three days, languished, lost consciousness, and breathed her last breath.

Mairie disappears here. First, she is veiled by Jacques' gaze, which makes her protracted death appear a celebratory liberation from her flesh, her frail limbs relics, her last day a wedding day. And then she becomes inaccessible to me, as she was to those around her. She plunges into herself, becomes mute.

There is a kind of suffering here I don't understand. It might seem obvious to see her death as a last act of resistance — or last subjection — but I don't feel capable of interpreting it. I know that aversion to food, the desire not to consume anything, but for me it lasts a few days at most, and is indistinguishable from my desire to be *less*, less of a *man*. The aversion to inhabiting a gender always looking to satisfy its desire, to assimilate the world in its image. (A key aspect of the male gaze of the hagiographies: the complete failure to grasp the one turned away. The tendency to take the one turned away, and especially the woman, as an invitation. Even when she is beside herself or unconscious, even when she is dead, she offers meaning.)

Still, this sense that my attempt to empty myself comes from a position of excess and autonomy. That my desire to destroy my enclosed and willful self is also a form of resisting the position I've been gendered to occupy. But is it also possible that the autonomous and impenetrable subject—who occupies such a central place in the misogynistic and anthropocentric culture of the West—is, in reality, a subject created in the image of a man? And in that sense, not worth anyone striving for?

That thought also makes it necessary to insist that the self-destructive spirituality practiced by Mairie and her contemporaries possibly constituted a project of liberation, which didn't need to end in self-effacement, and might have led to new ways of life. Before she moved to Oignies to begin her slow process of dying, Mairie lived near the hospital in Willambroux for fifteen years, surrounded by a group of trusted female companions. Jacques writes little about this period of her life, which makes me imagine things: their lives without men, how they took care of each other and created the necessary structures for their ascetic practice, their ecstasies and visions. How they read and wrote and taught each other, working to increase their strength: tending the land, taking care of the animals, building houses, trying to become self-sufficient so that they could materially divest from the patriarchy as well.

It was around this time, between 1190 and 1225, that beguine movement started and had its first, informal phase.<sup>10</sup> Mairie D'Oignies was previously thought to be a kind of founder, but most historians today agree that the movement started spontaneously and didn't have any unifying figure: small communities of women looking for something similar—often leaving parents, husbands, and children behind to find it—sprang up in multiple places in the Low Countries within a short period of time. They had no established rule or central order. They organized themselves in small, non-hierarchical communes that shared their land and traded freely, a kind of anarcho-communism. Most of them worked, either with textiles or the land, or as nurses and teachers, so that they could support the withdrawn life of contemplation that seems to have been so important to them while still playing an active and visible role in social life. They became a kind of threshold figure, capable of crossing the border between the religious and worldly spheres, over the course of a life or a day: beguine and celibate for a period of time and then married, or vice versa; wandering from their houses, which often lay on the city outskirts, to the church and back again, working in town or the fields during the day to retreat into prayer, reading, and mediation at night.

Their border-crossing quickly became a threat to those in power. Around the year 1230, local and regional lords — in collaboration with the church and a number of religious orders, especially the Dominicans — began to gather the beguines in large, enclosed architectural complexes, known as “court begunages,” which consisted of apartments and workshops set around a centrally-located church. The complexes were a kind of town within a town; they could accommodate up to 1500 people. And they were legitimated by language that strongly recalls that used by contemporary nation states to legitimize discrimination, increased police force, and states of emergency: they were “a necessary protection against a threat.” In a number of foundational charters of 13<sup>th</sup> century court begunages, both ecclesiastical and worldly authorities claim that they intend to protect the local beguines from the danger of sexual assault associated with wandering through market squares and inns on

10. My account of the history of the beguines is primarily based on Walter Simons's *Cities of Ladies – Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

their way to church and back home.<sup>11</sup> It makes me wonder whether the kinship between the patriarchy and the modern states is exactly that: both legitimize their existence by claiming to protect against a threat that they are responsible for creating. The state uses a “state of emergency,” the patriarchy the threat of sexual violence. And to give this threat the appearance of a necessary condition, of a law of nature, both the state and the patriarchy rely on an image of humans, and especially women, as inherently sinful. Christianity delivers it in the form of original sin, a burden that the women of the middle ages bore the greatest weight of: in the story of the Fall they became the cause of sin, and in medieval, neo-Platonic images of the world as pure body and desire, the source of all kinds of sin, even when they were victims of sexual assault (the blame, which, to this day, is often placed on victims of sexual assault can accurately be called medieval).

In reality, the patriarchy’s problem with the beguines was not that they were women wandering freely about town, but that they no longer could be identified as such. As the Franciscan theologian Gilbert de Tournai wrote in a letter to the Pope: “There are among us women whom we have no idea what to call, ordinary women or nuns, because they live neither in the world nor out of it.”<sup>12</sup>

In their very way of life, the beguines broke with the categories that the patriarchy used to classify a woman’s life: worldly (*in* the world, under the authority of a father or husband) or religious (outside of the world, under the authority of God by the laws of the cloister). A beguine

11. The vicar of Tongeren, wrote, with the support of the Dominican order, of the motivations for the construction of court beguinages in 1245: “Since devout maidens commonly called beguines chose and acquired houses for them in our parish of Tongeren, outside the gate known as the “hospital gate,” in order to pursue more peacefully the contemplation of the divine and to be further removed from the disorder and clamor of lay people, we wish to grant them that just peace. Therefore, so as not to allow the opportunity or reason for them to run about and err, which might result from attending parish churches in the town, especially because they live so far away from these churches that they must pass market squares and streets and even by inns, and because on high feasts they find themselves submerged by crowds of the populace in the main church of Tongeren, where they might eagerly observe these people while being dangerously exposed to them (...)” (Simons, *Cities of Ladies*).

12. *Gender and the Medieval Beguines*, Abby Stoner: [www2.kenyon.edu/projects/margin/beguine1.htm](http://www2.kenyon.edu/projects/margin/beguine1.htm)

life was neither, *neither nor*; it wasn’t classifiable. Sidestepping the *worldly/religious* binary, the beguines were able, for a time, to escape the category of “woman” as defined by the patriarchy and took on the power to define themselves. The historical sources don’t say much about how, only that there was—as there is beyond any binary—a proliferation of possibilities: of ways of life, of collectives small and large, of various handcrafts, saints to pray to, male and female too: the Virgin Mary as bride, Jesus as mother, nursing with his open wound, drawn closer and closer to his breast.<sup>13</sup>

I think it was the possibility of the beguines’ autonomy, glimpses of power to define themselves or not, that the patriarchy couldn’t handle. That was why they were gathered in these complexes. Their daily routes delineated by the roads and paths that ran through them, always along a wall or in the shape of a cross. Unlike nuns, they were allowed to leave the complex during the day, but now that all their activities were gathered in one place, they had little reason to do so. Official rules were enforced, a prioress was appointed and a scriptural father assigned to be their confessor. It was a way to manage them, to monitor them for orthodoxy. Otherwise, they couldn’t know what they were doing in their houses at night, what they were teaching each other and their students, which new forms of theology they were making, which forms of knowledge they shared and how. When a form of life collapses existing identity categories, when bodies no longer correspond to their labels, a space opens in which actions, thoughts, and practices cannot be controlled — in which even bodies themselves cannot be identified. Here, by way of conclusion, an attempt to let the beguines speak:

*Beguine. Most use the word about religious women not bound to a cloister; others to describe our gray-brown clothes, neither bleached nor dyed. But some have told me that it comes from Albigensis, or Albi, the lecherous town in southern France where there was the outbreak of heresy. And others that it refers to one*

13. Caroline Walker Bynum provides a particularly thorough and insightful account of the multifaceted—and often fairly queer—forms of female spirituality in the High Middle Ages. See, for example: *Jesus as Mother – Studie in the spirituality of the high middle ages*, University of California Press, 1984, and *Holy Feast and Holy Fast – the religious significance of food to medieval women*, University of California Press, 1988.

*who stutters, mumbles, speaks unclearly, as if fallen into their prayers, a prayer so private it cannot be heard. I think that the latter must be right because the learned always suspect us of our language. That we read the scriptures unlearned and misinterpret them, that we say one thing and mumble another; once we were depicted with bulging, amber eyes, and forked tongues. Not here, but in the house of our sisters on the other side of the river, and above the painting there stood: Beguine. And yet some of us have begun to take the name, those who have purchased property; they call their residences "beguinages" and have appointed a magistra, a prioress, someone in charge, approved by a priest or prior. I know that Clarisse occasionally acts the role of leader here, but that was never the intention. We meant to live together, in our collective renunciation of power: of what follows from property and the ability to say I, to exercise one's will, to decide for others. I thought that the latter would be gone with the former. I understand that the knowledge of the suspicions that surround us make Clarisse afraid and make her cherish what the others say we are. But are we even beguines? Are we not mere women living together in poverty, from our own harvest and the work of our hands? Are we not mere farmers, doctors, teachers, weavers, and blacksmiths? Did we not labor on our ancestral land, did we not stand in the field, feel the grain-brown expanse pulling ourselves out of ourselves and know: we could be so full of God that nothing else would be left? And did we not take to the cities to find each other? Or to find support in chastity, when a farmer bought the land and thought we should be part of the purchase? Or were we already in the city, finding each other through the tenderness of our hands? Do we not observe the canonical hours, morning, afternoon, and evening, and make the time between an unbroken prayer? And do we not forget them if Jesus's wound draws us in, if he asks us to drink or stick a finger inside? Do we not think of him, if it is him we love most? Or of the Virgin, if it is she? Does she not pass us her child, as a mother gives her son to a nurse, and do we not receive him and kiss his face, as if we were eating a piece of fruit? And do we not let ourselves be married to her, if that is what she wants of us? Do we not know our desire, and do we not follow the path that will make it flourish until it too exceeds us? Is it not so? Are we not many?*

# New Gaze

**Ingvild Langgård & Signe Becker**

**in conversation with  
Elin Amundsen Grinaker.  
Photo: Alette Schei Rørvik**

**New Gaze** started as a conversation between Signe Becker, Ingvild Langgård and Elin Amundsen Grinaker about the inspirations in Becker and Langgård's collaborative works. The conversation centered around how archaeological finds have been interpreted by Victorian men, who left a fray of goddesses – who were of great importance in prehistoric times – out of history. Langgård and Becker present tales, research and anecdotes, and this text is a collection of these different voices. The photos are by Alette Schei Rørvik, illustrating the work of Signe Becker.

**Signe Becker** is a freelance scenographer and artist educated at the Norwegian Theatre Academy in Fredrikstad and Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Her artistic projects include theatre and dance productions, as well as personal art projects; mainly textile works, sculptures and video. She has worked on a number of productions, and since 2006 been a permanent scenographer at Verk Produksjoner. *Skeleton Woman* is part of Becker's PhD studies at Oslo Academy of the Arts.

**Ingvild Langgård** is a composer, musician and sound artist, educated at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Langgård composes and performs sound and music in different media, such as live performance, sound installations, and music for stage, ensemble and film, and has released two albums under the name Phaedra. Her artistic works and live performances are shown in museums, galleries and venues such as The Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Kunstnerforbundet, Lydgalleriet, The Munch Museum and Henie Onstad Art Centre.

**Alette Schei Rørvik** is a visual artist and freelance photographer, educated from the Bergen National Academy of the Arts with a BFA in Photography and an MFA in Art. She has been exhibited at Bergen Kunsthall, Fotogalleriet, UKS, Podium, USF Verftet, amongst other places. She works mainly with photography, in combination with other media such as video, text, installation and performance. Her projects are seemingly documentary, yet bordering towards fiction, the self-exploratory starting point gives a subtle backdrop for more universal themes.

**Elin Amundsen Grinaker** has a master in Dramaturgy from Aarhus universitet. She works as program dramaturge at Black Box teater, and is freelancing widely in the performing arts field where she has worked with Lisa Lie, Martin Forsberg, Demian Vitanza, Jenny Hval, Cornerstone, Det Norske Teatret, Lene Therese Teigen among others. She is co-editor and writer in the feminist fanzine Blazer.

This text was originally written in Norwegian and translated to English by Ingeborg Husbyn Aarsand and Josephine Kylén-Collins.

*“We all have a right to a history that is meaningful, useful, and liberatory.”*  
– Max Dashú<sup>1</sup>

1 – [www.suppressedhistories.net/presentations/womenshistory.html](http://www.suppressedhistories.net/presentations/womenshistory.html)

In 2017, Signe Becker and Ingvild Langgård created the piece *New Skin*. The notion behind the performance was the word or action *prosopopoeia*, meaning giving inanimate objects human traits, like feelings, emotions; a soul. The thought behind *New Skin* was giving inanimate objects life through a ritually charged theatrical space, built by visual and auditory elements. I noticed Signe and Ingvild were talking about prehistoric times and the possibility of a different system than patriarchy. I believe I even heard them saying “maybe the patriarchy is only a parenthesis in history” – and this made me curious. I met the two artists for a chat about the sources of inspiration they have created from and will continue to develop in their new work, *Skeleton Woman*, presented at Oslo Internasjonale Teaterfestival 2020.

Our conversation was like a cornucopia of anecdotes and words, suggestions of new readings of history, archeological findings, Goddesses, monotheistic religions, how the Christian calendar and the year 0 is arbitrary, myths, and the world's first poet, who – surprise! – was a woman! Our conversation was lively; a myriad of voices, and the rendering is an interconnected conversation without a direct sender.

*To run, to escape, to quiet and to pacify are yours, Inana.  
To rove around, to rush, to rise up, to fall down and to ..... a companion are yours, Inana. To open up roads and paths, a place of peace for the journey, a companion for the weak, are yours, Inana.  
To keep paths and ways in good order, to shatter earth and to make it firm are yours, Inana.  
To destroy, to build up, to tear out and to settle are yours, Inana.  
To turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man are yours, Inana.<sup>2</sup>*

2 – The world's first author known by name, High Priestess Enheduanna (2285-2250 f.v.t), wrote hymns and poems to celebrate the Goddess Inanna.

*The Book of Genesis* has had a strong influence on how we interpret the world we live in. Being a woman in the year 2020, reading about the shaming of Eve, how she shall give birth in pain, how Eve is Adams property, no wonder you want to pick up a different book, and look at history, or rather, herstory, with a new and more uplifting view. Signe and Ingvild discovered Merlin Stone's *When God Was a Woman*, a book which through archeological findings and interpretations suggests a quite different historical position for women.

– Stone deals with the disputes or discrepancy within the field of archeology between what has been described for us and what has been found. Meaningful objects have not always made sense to those who found them. Archeological findings have been interpreted from the point of view of those with the right to define, such as men in the Victorian age, members of the noble class in England or Germany, societies where women had a very limited role. History is interpreted and told by those who can write and those who are in a position to have their voices heard.

– Reading de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* made us really depressed, and that's how it all started. Reading feminist literature which deals with 2000 years of fucked up conditions for women can really bum you out. It was refreshing to find archeologists presenting other theories about history.

– It does not make sense that we base our calendar on the arbitrarily decided Christian year 0. An artificially placed number as if you woke up one day and decided: “time begins now!” But what actually happened at that time? And what is year 0 really? Is it when humans started walking? Is it the first sign of life on planet Earth? Is it the Big Bang? What is this 0? Everything that happened before Abraham and the Bible is actually defined as *prehistory*. *Before history*. Our calendar system even goes backwards from the year 0, and that’s pretty crazy because it creates a mindset suggesting that whatever happened before year 0 doesn’t count or isn’t relevant. Archeologists have found traces of human cultural activity from 20–40.000 years ago. That’s a lot of years compared to the mere 2000 years we are preoccupied with in our society. There are so many Goddesses to be found during that prehistoric period, and this points out that it is not at all certain that it “has always been this way”, as the history has been read and conveyed. These Goddesses aren’t part of our canons, they haven’t been talked about much. We are not proposing that matriarchy dominated the 40.000 years before the year 0, but it is likely that women had a bigger role than we have been taught. And that is a much more hopeful scenario.

– Speaking about feminism in our time often results in women ending up as a victim. In the making of *New Skin* we were trying to find a different energy and held on to the positive thought about a different herstory. The perspective you tell the story from is a choice. Women have always been present, no matter where you find yourself in a system, in a culture, your point of view will always be valid. The storyteller holds the narrative, she defines “how it really is.” This was our time to suggest the point of view.

















*Somewhere along the line, someone decided to call the investigation of women's history "passé".  
Hardly: we've only just begun!  
A few decades of research has barely scratched the surface of this undertaking which has colossal implications for understanding women's status – and for dislodging the stereotypes about who women are or can be.<sup>3</sup>*

3 – Max Dashú <http://www.suppressedhistories.net/presentations/womenshistory.html>

– The male gaze is still very present in today's narratives. The Oseberg Ship is one of the largest findings from the Viking era and the grave of two women, one old and one younger. There have been a lot of speculations around which king these two women were sisters of. But findings of ritual objects in the burial site indicate that they most probably were shamans, fortune tellers or medicine women. During the Viking era, the shamans were the most respected interpreters of religion and therefore would have had great authority in the society at the time – independent women who had a nomadic lifestyle, and may have lived outside the traditional family constellations existing in the Viking age's Norse clan systems.

– Much has been lost or given no value through history because those interpreting it haven't understood its meaning. For instance, the distaffs found amongst the artifacts on the Oseberg Ship. Made in such an expensive material, ornate and so heavy that they couldn't have been used to spin with, in its traditional sense. So, what were they? Most likely ritual objects used in magical practice called *seidr*, a practice related to shamanistic practices that were commonly used in the north at the time, mainly performed by women. If you were a man and executed these practices, you were most likely gay or transgendered. Also, in many shamanistic cultures, the shaman would cross-dress; moving across the lines of categories, such as inner-outer, life-death, animal-human, and in between the physical and spiritual worlds. These objects and practices had no meaning seen with the eyes of a Victorian historian. But today, having more sources of information, we can anticipate the outlines of what kind of practice these objects could be part of.

*She is thrown off a cliff, out into the sea by her father, and there she lies as a skeleton on the bottom of the ocean. One day a fisherman drifts too far on the ocean and his fishing net gets caught in the ribcage of the skeleton woman. She fights to get loose, but the harder she struggles, the more entangled she gets.*

*The fisherman pulls her up, she hangs on to his kayak by her front teeth. He tries to kick her off, and with all his strength row to get her off of the kayak, but still she hangs on. By the time he gets ashore he's entangled in the same fishing net as her, yet he tries to run away from her. When he arrives at his cabin he discovers she is right behind him. Suddenly he softens, speaking to her tenderly and untangles her from the net. He puts the pieces of her skeleton back into their right position and wraps her in a fur before going to bed. While sleeping, a tear escapes the corner of the fisherman's eye which the skeleton woman drinks. She carves out the heart of the sleeping fisherman, pounds on it and sings: "flesh, flesh, flesh", while her skeleton body fills with flesh. She sings muscles, hair, sex organ, breasts and hands onto*

*her bones. Her body is at last sung into place. She sings the fisherman's clothes off and lies down next to him, bare skin to bare skin. She puts his heart back into his chest, and they wake in an embrace.*

*In the epic poem Sigurðarkviða, a heroic lay from the poetic Edda, we meet valkyrjer or Valkyries, meaning chooser of the slain. Valr refers to the dead, and kyrjer comes from the verb kjosa or choose. One of the Valkyries, Sigdrifa, is sentenced to a long night's sleep after appointing another victor than the one Odin wants. She sleeps surrounded by flames until Sigurð comes and wakes her. She arises by greeting day and night.*

– Sigdrifa's greeting is a peek into another possible cosmology that does not shine through in other, often completely male-oriented, war-related myths. This is another example on things we don't know about the total cosmology from the pre-Christian Norse community. "Hail, day! Hail, sons of day! Hail night and her daughters! Hail abundant earth! Hail to the Gods! Hail Goddesses – everything!" She asks for victory, for wisdom, for the gift of being well-spoken, and for healing hands.

*Oh brightest Day  
Oh darkest Night  
Children of Day  
Night and Her kind  
Look upon us  
with loving eyes  
and grant to us  
the best of luck*

*Oh praise Divinity  
Outside and in me  
Abundant Earth  
Oh Endless Sky  
Grant us with words  
May we be wise  
And grant us healing  
hands  
while alive<sup>4</sup>*

4 – From *New Skin*, Ingvild Langgård's rendition of Sigdrífumál.

Marija Gimbutas was a Lithuanian-American archeologist whose theories were dismissed during large parts of her career. But with the help of modern DNA-research, her research has now gained credibility. Gimbutas argues that we have to look at archeological findings, not only from the perspective of the texts written about these prehistorical cultures by Christian priests. Like Merlin Stone, Gimbutas notes that these priests have written about ‘the others’; those who were regarded as less than the Christians, and that the interpretations done by them use a minimizing language for which does not fit in to their take on religion and society. While the priests write about “heathen icons” or “female figurines”, Stone and Gimbutas write about Goddesses.

– How we use language, the words we choose to describe something, affects how we read and consider each other as humans. When we write god with a capital G and Goddess with a small g – a use of language still practiced today – it affects what we as readers give value.

– Since the 1970s, a new direction in the field of archeology has developed, referring to herstory instead of history. Gimbutas asks; what do we see if we let go of the perspective history has been told from, and instead look directly at the artifacts that has been unearthed? How do we interpret them differently? The idea of the Great Goddess might be a 1970s dream. But what we do know is that there were great many Goddesses in prehistoric time. There hasn’t always been one single god as the Christian, Jewish, Muslim monotheistic narratives argue. We have enough knowledge to break with that existing narrative of how it might have been.

*You may not remember,  
but let me tell you this,  
someone in some future  
time will think of us.<sup>5</sup>*

5 – Sappho, Greek poet, composer, musician, teacher, priestesses of the goddess Aphrodite, 630 – c. 570 BC.

What I am about to write has been said or written about before. I wanted to write this for Black women. I am but one of many Black women who have written and spoken about their processes and experiences, who investigate and continue to be the voice of many. I am not the voice of healing, I am not the voice of Black women, but I am the voice of my own healing and my blackness, and, if my voice can echo others' voices, then my voice is part of the many voices of healing. That is where I can start.

**Ubuntu – Healing rooms** is a commissioned text by Duduzile Mathonsi about the necessity and possibility of healing rooms for Black women. At Oslo Internasjonale Teaterfestival 2020, she is presenting her performance *Bitch Where the Fuck is my Manifesto?!*

**Duduzile Mathonsi** is an actress, writer, voice artist and performance artist. She has extensive experience in television, film and radio production, which include producing, directing, screenwriting, and on-screen and on-air presence. Duduzile is also a certified journalist who has worked for some of South Africa's biggest media houses. Mathonsi has a National Diploma in Language practice from the Tshwane University of Technology in South Africa and recently graduated as the first Black woman at the Norwegian Theatre Academy with a BA in acting. As a Language practitioner and performance artist, the core of her work is storytelling. She explores different mediums and ways of telling stories through movement/dance and voice/sound using embodiment.

## Chapter 1 – The start

I am a South African Black woman born in the late '80s of the tail-end chaotic uprising of Apartheid South Africa. Naturally, my birth came with no freedom. I was raised in the townships of the northern province of the country. In 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison, and that meant things were about to change.

In 1994, Black people were now allowed to move freely in their own country. That also meant that we could, as Black people, be part of 'White' society and move equally in White spaces; "whites only" areas including residential areas and schools. We could also stand in the same line at the grocery store and share something as simple as a bus. White people had to deal with us in spaces that were previously created to exclude us and to preserve their privilege – which meant that I then grew up in borrowed spaces, architectures and systems that were established. Forming resistances of an unparalleled equivalence of existence.

My parents sent me to "White schools" known as multi-racial schools. From the age of three, I was part of a handful of other Black children in my class. My parents thought if my siblings and I were sent to these schools, we would have a better chance at life. But that segregated me from the rest of the township children, granting me labels like *coconut* and *whitey*. Equally, at school, I was subjected to other racial curiosities, discrimination and identity confusion.

Moving to suburbia meant that the “White” neighbours didn’t like the idea of having the “kaffers” moving in next door (kaffer is a word equivalent to the word Nigger). We would go to the public swimming pool, and they would see us coming and would quickly get out of the pool as if we were bringing deadly diseases. Once my brothers and I got chased by a pedal-happy car full of White men, amused at the sight of Black kids running for their lives.

My hometown was a *Boere* (Afrikaaner farmers) town full of White farm owners who did not only own their farms, but also their workers. The workers would call them “*baas*” (master), and the mentality did not quite change much when Apartheid was over. Black people suffered from something I refer to as the “*masters syndrome*”. They were worshipping and seeing them and not daring to speak out.

On the other hand, my mother had no patience for the “*masters syndrome*”. From her, I learnt to fight back whether verbally or physically. Yes – it was a time where force was needed. Coming from the history of apartheid’s violence and that being one of the only ways to survive and fight the system, it was automatic. In this way, I became a problem child within whiteness. I was the “the troublemaker” at school; always political about race.

Those became my first understandings of what it meant for me to be Black, in a country where my freedom has been fought for with blood, sweat and tears. Yet, we were still fighting to be heard and seen, and the only thing that had changed was that we were allowed to move in the same spaces. For a child, that kind of psychology becomes an embedded archive. It has moulded its course through my being, creating a “hunter vs hunted” mentality of “Us vs Them”.

## Chapter 2 – Privilege

There is an overwhelming amount of present pain and discrimination that Black people today still cannot escape from. From the racial inequalities to the westernised social constructs and cultural appropriation that still is overlooked or undermined.

When I became employed, two decades after democracy, I realized white privilege was still in play. Black people were earning less than their white counterparts and Black women even less. Meanwhile, my white counterparts, who had benefited from the past system, didn’t have to worry so much about money.

You see, when a Black person starts to work, most have no privileges of having parents who can help them out. The system doesn’t accommodate your disadvantages. Most Black people have “black tax” which is when you are taxed by your family. Families sacrifice almost everything to make sure their child gets an education, in hopes the child will get them out of poverty or help get your siblings through school.

I had to face the reality of being part of a majority in a country where you do not own land and where more than 80 percent of the country is still owned by the white minority. So I decided to try my luck elsewhere.

I then moved to Norway for a degree in acting at the Norwegian Theatre Academy in Fredrikstad, a small town in the South of Norway, with frequent neo-nazi activity. I was excited about this European life that is advertised to the world with such romanticism of a better life. What was omitted is that “terms and conditions apply”.

Here, I experienced a new form of discrimination, one I had only heard and read about through American pop culture. Being a minority here, one is told to conform, “*you can’t be African, you are not in Africa*” and having to forcefully take on the Scandinavian version of life, where you have a voice – but your voice is not to be heard. This is such a contrast to coming from a country where I am free today because of voices that *were* heard.

The first time I laughed in a public space in Norway, people turned around and looked at me with fear and disgust of how ill-mannered I was for not knowing how to hold my natural sound. The sheer shock of my laughter, which to me is a beautiful release. At times when I speak, I will see someone close their ears as if I were a megaphone, or *shh*ing me as if I were a child speaking out of turn. What the environment does not understand is that I too have sore ears from whispers of soft-spoken voices all day, and that it is about learning to respect each others in-prints.

I have now recently graduated as the first Black woman at the Norwegian Theatre Academy. I am grateful for the education, it was unique, fulfilling and has given me valuable tools in life.

In 2019, I question being the first Black, that in itself shows the problematics of western societies and the sad reality of navigating Norwegian institutions as a Black woman. I inhabited an art education for three years navigating and forcefully enforcing my existence in a Norwegian institution as an indifferent human.

My body as a Black woman was not allowed to exist or claim space. Battling your way through a degree in that way is inhumane. Yet, existing alone as a Black woman, this experience also helped pave the way for the next Black woman. But the mental and physical exhaustion it took, broke me. It was not my job to do so, yes, but we live in a world where it became my job.

## Chapter 3 – un-Censored

The conversations of languages and body languages are different, and I refuse to mute my body and language. In most instances, my body is read as overbearing and aggressive when in fact I am as cool as a cucumber.

As an African woman, my voluptuous body is my pride. When I move, it has a rhythm and language, which is connected to my ancestral roots. In White spaces, my body reacts and is reacted to differently. When I am in a room, the room changes depending on what I need to accomplish in the room.

And then there is the hair, yes; the hair. Most White South Africans do not like our natural hair. They find it untidy, unpleasant to look at and disgusting to touch. In schools, Black children are told to tame their wild hair and are limited to how they can wear their hair.

In Norway, our hair is a walking spectacle. It is treated like a new scientific discovery, where everyone wants to touch or see up close, all excusing it on curiosity or the friendly answer “*but you can touch mine*” when you tell them: “Don’t touch my hair!” Black hair is about freedom of expression!

What’s puzzling is the lack of interest in blackness, lack of research and furthermore the lack of self-research before asking the question, that I don’t know how to answer; “*is your hair coiled because of the sun?*” and finding myself having to explain my existence. As though I was from a tribe that was recently discovered because we can discover people and claim their land and get statues in our honour.

The conversation about race is mostly met with “*why can’t we all be human and not see colour?*”. This is a complete disregard for what colour is. People of colour are disadvantaged and segregated. There are inequalities that have not changed for people of colour over the centuries, how slavery has found a new form in capitalism and bureaucracy.

## Chapter 4 – Healing rooms

*The world unchanged  
but moving forward  
somehow giving me grace in being a Black woman  
constantly striving through  
but equally explosively and majestic  
into a dim light shadowed to us  
by its unchanging existence*

Before I can attempt to be part of the healing of a Black diaspora, I need to look at where my healing starts.

The attempted execution of *healing rooms* all began when I was recently part of a theatre play called *Black women rising*, played at the Nordic Black Theatre in Oslo, Norway. The play is about the American poet, singer, memoirist, and civil rights activist Dr Maya Angelo, and I played one of the two main characters portraying her. This was an all-women cast, and from this, I got the opportunity to understand the common traumas we all faced as women.

Almost every night after the show, I had young Black women asking me if there is a space where Black women can have safe spaces and if I could create one. When I was first asked I said to the particular young lady that I wouldn’t know how, but then the requests from other young women kept coming. I then approached some Black female friends of mine who are in the arts and asked them if they would be interested in helping me create a space where Black women in the diaspora could gather and heal. Turns out they were thinking about it too, wanting to create similar spaces.

It then leads me back to the *how* – how do we create a space of safety for Black women away from the White gaze, away from the male gaze. Raw, no shields, no masks, no explaining or censorship and obligation to whiteness or patriarchy, space of necessary release. Somewhere, where we could be with our healing and not doing it for anyone else but us. Creating processes where we can be whole in ways that nourish and empower Black women.

We would be doing it for our children, investing in some of the groundwork for our great-grandchildren and creating processes of healing for generations to come. Being in the unlearning process and finding new mechanisms, not coping mechanisms because coping mechanisms can fail. When I cope, it means I am not completely okay, I am just holding on to a line. If healing does not take place how can we find new ways of sustaining our mental health, sustaining ourselves and evolving as Black women? There is an evolutionary process that can not exist if the healing does not become continuous work; work that aspires to become the DNA of Black women. It needs to become a working muscle that is trained regularly.

## Chapter 5 – Evolution

When I began my healing process, when finding my identity, some of the realisations were that I had to accept that I was born into generational archives of trauma, a trauma that was infringed upon generations of Black women and men across the board. Having been born in apartheid, and living through it and the transition, meant that the world I came from was based upon Black and White. I had separated slavery and apartheid, not fully comprehending the systematic engravement of how apartheid was merely the continuous systems of slavery.

In this day and age, I can still say that I was born a slave, born of a place that doesn't see me as a human or as an equal, but as an object born to serve the master, born to not look at myself as vulnerable because there is no space for that. Needing to suppress who I am, what I want, what I aspire, my presence shrunken and existing solely for the pleasure of my suppressor.

I was recently in South Africa for a visit. I decided to attend a panel discussion for Black women in leadership, lead by a panel of strong Black women in leadership roles with an audience of mixed races and genders. From what I had gathered, the event had aimed or aspired to create a safe environment for Black women. The panel discussion revolved a lot around men and particularly around the contribution of Black men to Black women's pain and them being the culprits to South African women's current trauma.

What we must understand is that South Africa is living in post-apartheid, but the ripple effects of apartheid are still present in the segregation and complete disregard for women. Over the years there has been a high number of abductions, trafficking, rape and murder cases especially of women and girls, some by their partners or family members, and others by complete strangers. It is a painful reality that all South African women are living in constant fear every day.

During the question section, I made a comment which looked at the root rather than the symptom of Black men being contributors: how the struggle of Black men's traumas contributed to the attacks against Black women. In my alternative voice of approach, I then became the villain who focused on men issues at a Black women's event, who took away space for Black women to air out their grievances in the space and centralised men. I was attacked by justified Black women and praised by Black men for allowing their traumas into the spatial conversation. I was embarrassed and felt singled out. I could not really sleep that night thinking about how I was completely disregarded by other Black women. I thought I had joined a space that was safe and familiar, not realising that it was only an attempt of a safe space where everyone was navigating and maybe not ready for my kind of approach.

Maybe I just no longer understood what being a Black woman in South Africa was, maybe I was westernized, or maybe I had just come from a safer environment with first world problems. After ping-ponging all scenarios and having chains of conversations with other people, I realised we were all dealing with our traumas, and somehow we were all triggering each other. And each of our trauma was over-clouding each other's ability to acknowledge each other's points of view, coping mechanisms and methods of problem-solving.

I started to question my quest to create *healing rooms*: How could I write about healing if I am not fully healed? How can I attempt to create safe spaces for healing? I had convinced myself that to address healing, I had to be healed, and I thought I was, I had been proud of investing the healing work. Then, again having to go back to some of the roots of my traumas and indoctrinations. It then hit me; that I had been swimming for as long as my memory serves me, because drowning was never an option.

I come from a family of strong women healers, and a generational inheritance of healing. My grandmother was a traditional healer (an equivalent to a medical doctor in western civilization) who was taught African medicine by her father and therefore passing on the healing gifts to her children and grandchildren.

I was taught by the women in my family:

*"you can cry, but when you are done, you're done!"*  
*"Wipe your tears and find a solution".*

That is who I have been:

*"never let them see you cry"*  
*"I am a strong Black woman".*

A woman who has to categorise which hurt she is allowed to deal with, not only because she needs to survive, but because there has never been space to just be.

Now, I understand where the women in my family were coming from, where other Black women are coming from. They were born in a system that dehumanized their existence that valued us as slaves. Not only as objects, but as slaves, because you can show affection and empathy for an object, but you can only have sympathy for a slave. And as history has shown us, objects can be valued more than humans.

That being said, when do we find healing? What does healing look like? Can we be healed? I spent the majority of my short life not being vulnerable, not allowing any form of emotions to cloud anything, but what I hadn't realised was that I was hurting more than I could comprehend, hurting not only for myself but for my ancestors.

Black people throughout the world over the centuries have had to survive through healing. We have to continue the healing process, and that's why there are practices. I think this is the next step of healing because each generation meets its own challenges and has to rediscover what they need in the environment they find themselves in. When navigating new forms of healing practises as the world evolves, so should the healing processes.

The diaspora now consists of people coming into western contexts, each of them with their own agency and backgrounds. Different people are meeting with different archives and having similar to the same experiences of discrimination, racism or dehumanisation.

The questions can be asked: what does that mean? Who are we in all of this? How do we now find space to exist outside of our own? It comes back to; what constitutes being Black?

Blackness has been about being chameleonic and kaleidoscopic, forever changing for surroundings and accepting different social roles, so we can be acknowledged by whiteness and be cut into the piece of the privileged pie. Thereby taking away the natural pureness of who we are, and giving us different societal roles.

I carry my archives. These archives have influenced how I move, how I react, how I exist. Now the bigger question is: who am I now after these experiences?

I am a Black female woman, which by birth I am at the bottom of the human chain, just before homosexual and transsexual Black women. The odds of society across the world, are against me. Basically, there is no escaping the archive which is constantly resonating in me. These are the realities and everyday truths of what blackness is for me.

I cannot give a blueprint or say what a healing room should look like because we all need to find what healing looks like to us.

My healing comes with my archive and therefore my recipe will have my own special ingredients that shape and mould my process. That said, we cannot heal alone; by virtue of being human, companionship is essential to our being.

One needs to find their healing first, and then, let's heal together however that may look like, because space is everywhere and anywhere, and no room can heal you; only you can heal yourself.

With that said, using our indifferences and realizing our indifferences are what make us unite as humans; what make us strong, the world may remove our individualism but that should not be our weakness. Everyone needs healing and to find space for healing.

*UBUNTU* 'I am because you are'. South African philosophy.

*From opera to opra to Ø  
to the Followers of Ø  
– A tracing of the  
history leading up to  
The Norwegian Opra's  
affirmative Oratory  
To arms! To arms!*

—

By Trond Reinholdtsen,  
opra director of  
The Norwegian Opra

***From opera to opra to Ø to the Followers of Ø – A tracing of the history leading up to The Norwegian Opra's affirmative Oratory To arms! To arms!*** is a commissioned text where the opra director at Den Norske Opra, Trond Reinholdtsen, writes about the history of this institution and its followers.

**Trond Reinholdtsen** is educated as a classical composer and singer. In his work, he is mixing references to lecture, documentary, performance and banality with his interest in narrative form, mathematical structure and communist propaganda.

It is not necessary to repeat to the readers of this publication that opera as a relevant and potent art form is dead, and has been so for almost a hundred years (since 1925, exactly). Despite the effective use of newly built fancy-schmæncy architecture opera houses serving as tourism magnets, despite politicians' vanity projects and signifiers of urban capitalistic dynamism, and despite desperate attempts to fake coolness and contemporaneity in belated Regitheater-stagings with Rigoletto in jeans, der Holländer as business man or Papageno as television celebrity, and despite still another sorry composer sacrificing artistic integrity and accepting impossible working conditions in the hope of gaining some remnant of quasi-public appreciation, we will not let ourselves be fooled: Nothing, in terms of true artistic value or authentic creation, is happening with opera anymore.

This we all know.

And it needs no further discussion. So when the The Norwegian Opra had its inaugural performance of Orpheus in the opera director's living room in Oslo gate 7 in Oslo 2009, it was but a coincidence that The Norwegian Opera and Ballet in Bjørvika – which incidentally can be seen from of the former institution's

toilet window – opened the same week (or so). The art form in question is no longer the outcast genre of “opera”, but rather the new and potentially virginally fresh “opra”; a genre devoid of the Schlamm of traditions and definitions. While The Norwegian Opera and Ballet considered having one world premiere during its first five years, The Norwegian Opra announced 15 in its first year (admittedly all of them by the opra director himself).

The founding principle of The Norwegian Opra was the old Marxist maxim to gain “total control over the means of production”. All aspects of the institution should be treated artistically. The aim was, through a radical downscaling of the opera apparatus, to reclaim nothing less than ARTISTIC FREEDOM AT ITS PUREST (which is fundamentally lost in the repressive bureaucratic, overly-academic, sneak-commercialized and conservative elitism of the contemporary music scene). I was myself the dictatorial opra director, the composer of all works, as well as the librettist, director, Heldentenor, scenographer, propaganda minister, web designer, ticketmaster, cleaning assistant, conceptual consultant, head of the Worker's Union, restaurant chief etc. No more weak institutional criticism aiming to modify the system from the inside

(which I had done for years)!  
From now on, I build my own  
institutions!

In 2015, The Norwegian Opra had grown to a small crew of dedicated Opra-Superstars and moved its location to the forest in Sweden to further radicalize its quest for “isolation and concentration” signaling a brutal cut with THE SYSTEM, and in the end also abandoning the concept of “the audience”. Instead, in the cellar of the opera house, an infinite series of opra-films, was begun under the name  $\emptyset$ . It is a mixture of dystopian science fiction, verismo, communist propaganda, outdated existentialism and plump autobiography. In other words, a little like *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (but much longer of course). The operatic series counts 16 – no, 17! – episodes at the moment of writing, with one – admittedly complicated, but nonetheless continuous – narrative: Three protagonists, for the sake of simplicity let’s call them Parsifal, Parsifal and Parsifal, grow up in a cellar totally isolated from THE OUTSIDE. They form a kind of enthusiastic alchemistic sect, and gradually, a vision of a totally world changing Event grows forth. Gradually though, their experiments in political theory and new art forms seem to somehow lose some of the initial “directedness”, and the fear is that they are getting stuck

in some sort of theoretical centripetal post-structuralist blind alley quagmire of doubts, indecisions and general philosophical fragmentation. They are also perfect. Yes, this is what perfection looks like. Perfection comes in the form of the Void ( $\emptyset$  is the mathematical symbol of the “empty set”). It would be irritating to go into a further explanation at this point, so please just accept this as an axiom for now.

BUT (fortunately): The opra films are posted on the so called “internet” and a group of viewing enthusiasts, a gang of idealized audience members, a true cult of Precariat-Proletariat of Chosen Ones going under the name of “The Followers of  $\emptyset$ ” have gathered together from all over the world, transcending all identitarian borders, at a big meadow in the forest of Sweden. Toward this unlikely spot, they all gravitate: The old, the sick, the converted capitalists, the minorities, the incels, the Lumpenproletariat, the stupid, the sick, the animals, the monsters, the un-organic things, all forms of matter – in short: the radical universal Everyone. They aim to interpret and translate the message of  $\emptyset$  into potent action in the concrete reality of our world: An affirmative transition from theory to PRAXIS.

A kind of nucleus commune is consolidated on the paradisiacal meadow, but their true orientation and format is The Whole World. While  $\emptyset$  is the ultimate withdrawal from political, digital and everyday banality for the sake of Truth in an absolute refusing of the Idea of the Public, The Followers, in an operation of true Hegelian *Aufhebung*, turns this into its own negative. The authentic Opposite is the confirmation of the original Truth. Or in a more theological language: If  $\emptyset$  is the testament, The Followers of  $\emptyset$  are the apostles. Their first official appearance will be a two and a half hour ideological affirmative Oratory in Jakob kirke in Oslo called *To arms! To arms!* Yep, ladies and gentlemen, the time of ambiguous theatre of minor particular struggles, weak pockets of resistance and meditative considerations is over. The time for the propagandistic medium of the forgotten Oratory is here! Oslo International Theatre Festival has changed its name to Oratory Festival of the Stunde Null Internationale! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!

The Followers, as the rest of us, have understood that we are all heading towards the Apocalypse. As a civilization we have totally lost the ability to create or to re-imagine the future. All political invention, creativity and grand-

ness come solely in the form of neo-fascism and are driven by the more or less secret desire for violence. Meanwhile, the rest of the political sphere are forced into a totally defensive apathy and are not able to do anything other than trying to save what can be saved of formerly gained goods of the common, lobbying for unisex toilet and otherwise keep as silent as possible and hope for the best. It is an impotent struggle for a “capitalism with a human face”.

There has evolved a version of so-called “accelerationism” bordering on the pathological in a dark corner of contemporary thinking (but the dark corners seem to be the new centre anyway). This version, sometimes called “Apocalyptic accelerationism”, may represent the true moral challenge of today. It grew out of a hallucinatory mixture of the cyberpunk culture of the 80’s, the rave and drug Jungle-techno scene of the 90’s, and a sinister desire for the ultimate unknown and radical alterity. It was cooked up by the notorious Nick Land and his gang of student disciples in his infamously greasy office in the University of Warwick in England. When reading about it today, it comes forth as pure death drive translated to philosophy: To accelerate capital, growth, digitalization and cryptology (!) until systematic overflow and possible

human extinction, until hopefully some form of artificial intelligence takes over the Promethean task of continuing progress and history. To go as far as possible whatever outcome, as general Kurtz in Nick Land's favourite movie *Apocalypse Now!* or as formulated in the title of his only published book *The Thirst for Annihilation*.

In 2020, when the perspective of catastrophic climate change and other environmental and social disasters feels acute, Land's suicidal strategy on behalf of humanity looms in the unconsciousness of our collective politics. Land offers the desire of submitting to the dynamic of capital and the machine while at the same time enjoying the hopelessness and apathy. A reality where, in the end, occultism is the only answer. It is a fantasy that is truly tempting.<sup>1</sup>

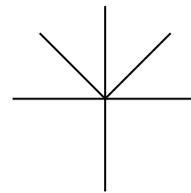
Does  $\emptyset$  prescribe an ethics of "deceleration", for example in the famous *Decelerationism Aria* of the mystical character "The Idea" in episode 9? Some musicologists, hermeneutics and researchers around the world certainly think so. But this would be a too simplistic simplification. To get to the bottom of the matter, it needs a bit more work (that is why the complete  $\emptyset$ -films, with live analysis and illuminating interventions by The Norwegian Opra crew, will be screened as a Vega cinema

Vorabend two days before the Oratory). "The Followers of  $\emptyset$ " have carefully studied the  $\emptyset$ -cycle and reached an already expert level of understanding. They aim to be the instruments of  $\emptyset$ . Former audience members of  $\emptyset$  have tried to interpret the world. The task now is to *change* it. But praxis means failure. Praxis always involves misunderstandings of theory. Praxis means repetition ("failing better" and all that). Praxis means continuation. Praxis has to cast off depression and fear. And most important: Praxis means commitment. Where follows: Praxis needs energy. Ergo: Praxis needs lemonade. The Oratory is a lemonade motor in the fight to upholding the energy. The energy to say (and do) "Yes". The libretto will be "Yes! Yes! Yes!" First act: "Yes!" Second act: "Yes! Yes" Third act: "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

1. Oder mit Wotan: "Nur eines will ich noch: Das Ende!"

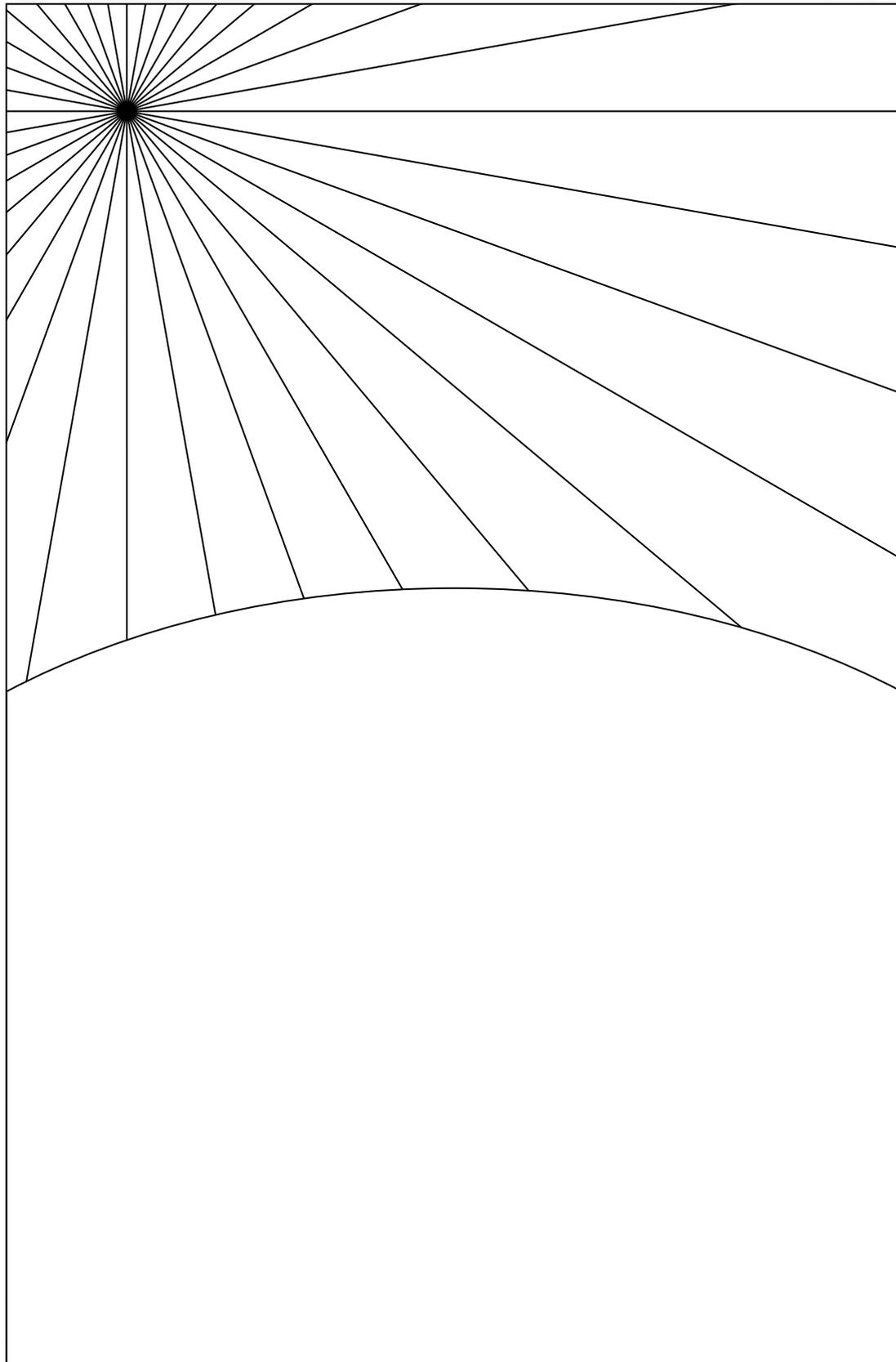
# An ARTivist manifesto for a post- democratic society

Concept and text by  
Saul Garcia-Lopez  
aka La Saula



Illustrated by Kristoffer Busch

**A note from La Saula:** Decanted under the intoxicating influence of the 'Trump Effect,' this live text synthesizes life and art as a quantic timeline. This document has been extracted and remixed from various personal manuscripts and inspired by Pocha Nostra "manifestos" and "anti-manifestos." This ARTivist manifesto expresses my personal aesthetics, and overarching political and pedagogical priorities. In it, I fully acknowledge my Pocha Nostra DNA. If you wish to reprint it, appropriate and use it as a temple for your own work, simply ask me for permission. I would be happy to share it and see it transformed under the influence of your own universe. This text is a living, ever-changing "open literary system:" my intent to convey embodied words and concepts in writing comes with interlinguistic locuras and the bending and fraying of the conventions of prose.



La

Saula

per-

formance

identity 2.8

**From the borders of  
my identity to the com-  
munity of rebel artists...**

Here begins the live streaming  
of the one they call...  
Saul Garcia-Lopez, Soul, Sol, Sal,  
LA SAULA...

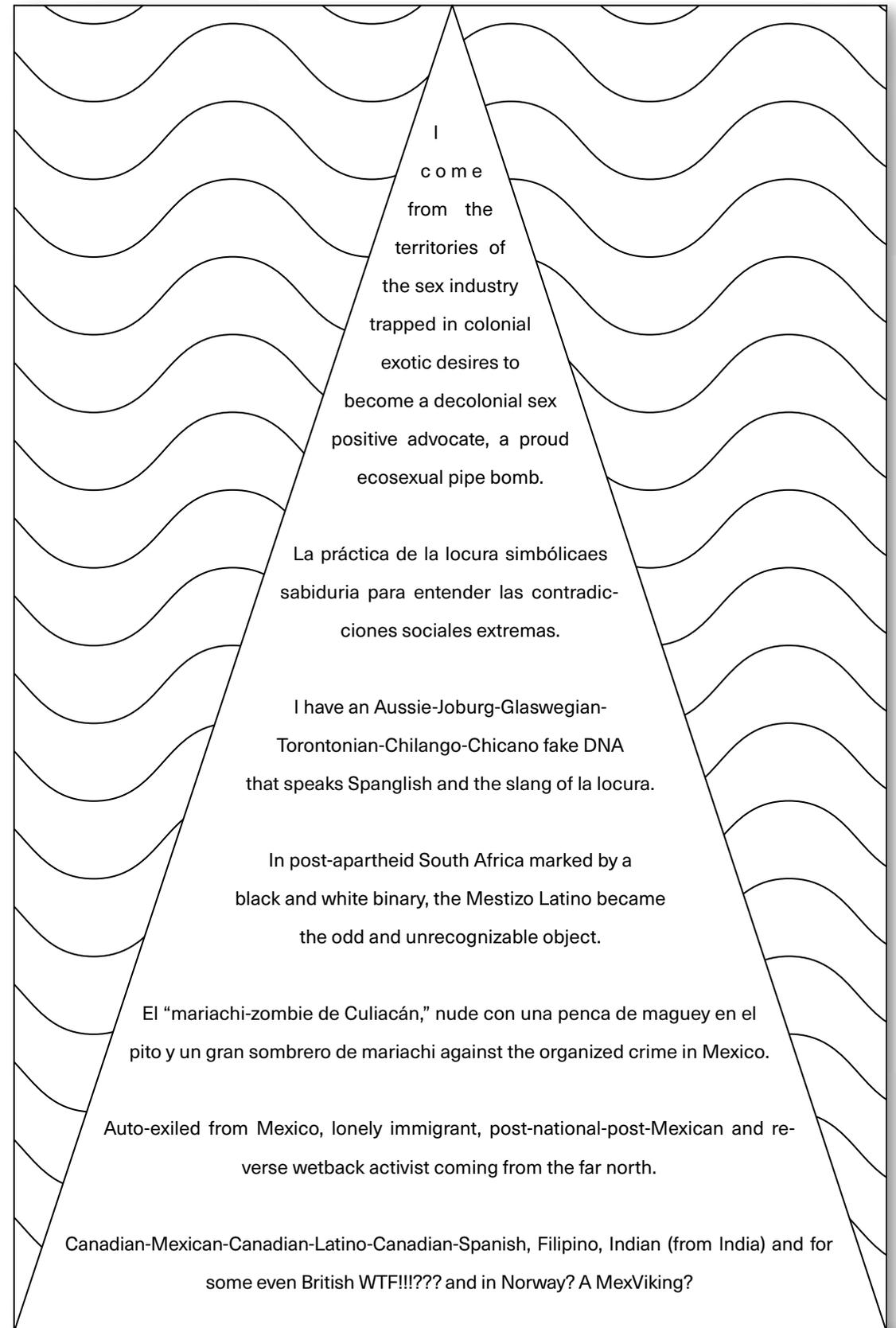
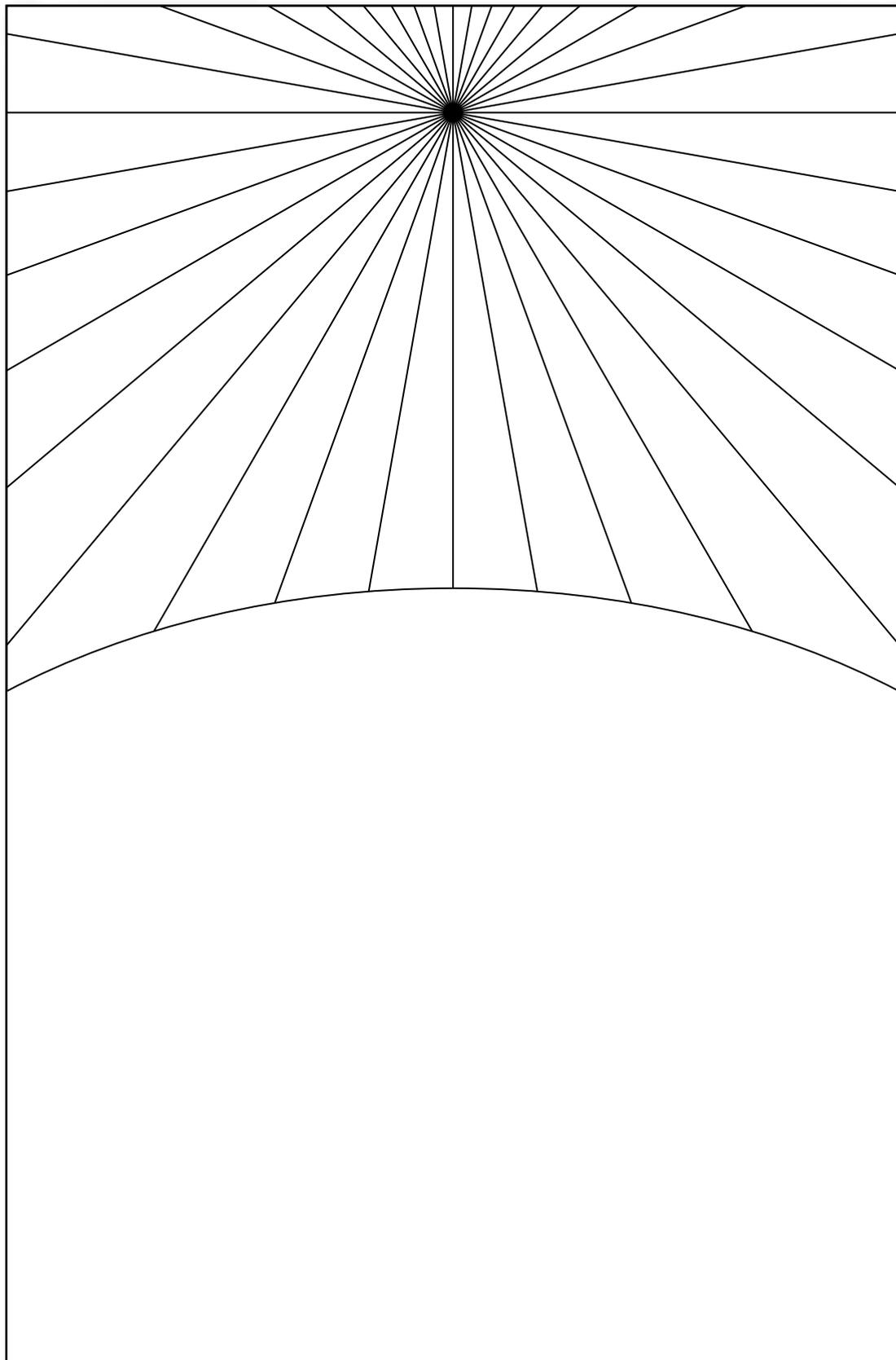
In Mexico City, I was a "chacal", a pejorative  
word for urban working-class indigenous guys  
from the ghetto.

I suffered bullying for seven long years at school  
because of my hazy gender orientation:  
not man, not woman.

I was sexually abused, the survivor of multiple rapes.  
I am standing,  
and standing strong.

In Australia, I was the Aztec prince! the hyper exxx-hot-sized Mexican.

Queer and three-spirited post-NAFTA chupacabras against the  
Trumpocalypse  
and the nightmares of globalization.



I  
c o m e  
from the  
territories of  
the sex industry  
trapped in colonial  
exotic desires to  
become a decolonial sex  
positive advocate, a proud  
ecosexual pipe bomb.

La práctica de la locura simbólica es  
sabiduría para entender las contradic-  
ciones sociales extremas.

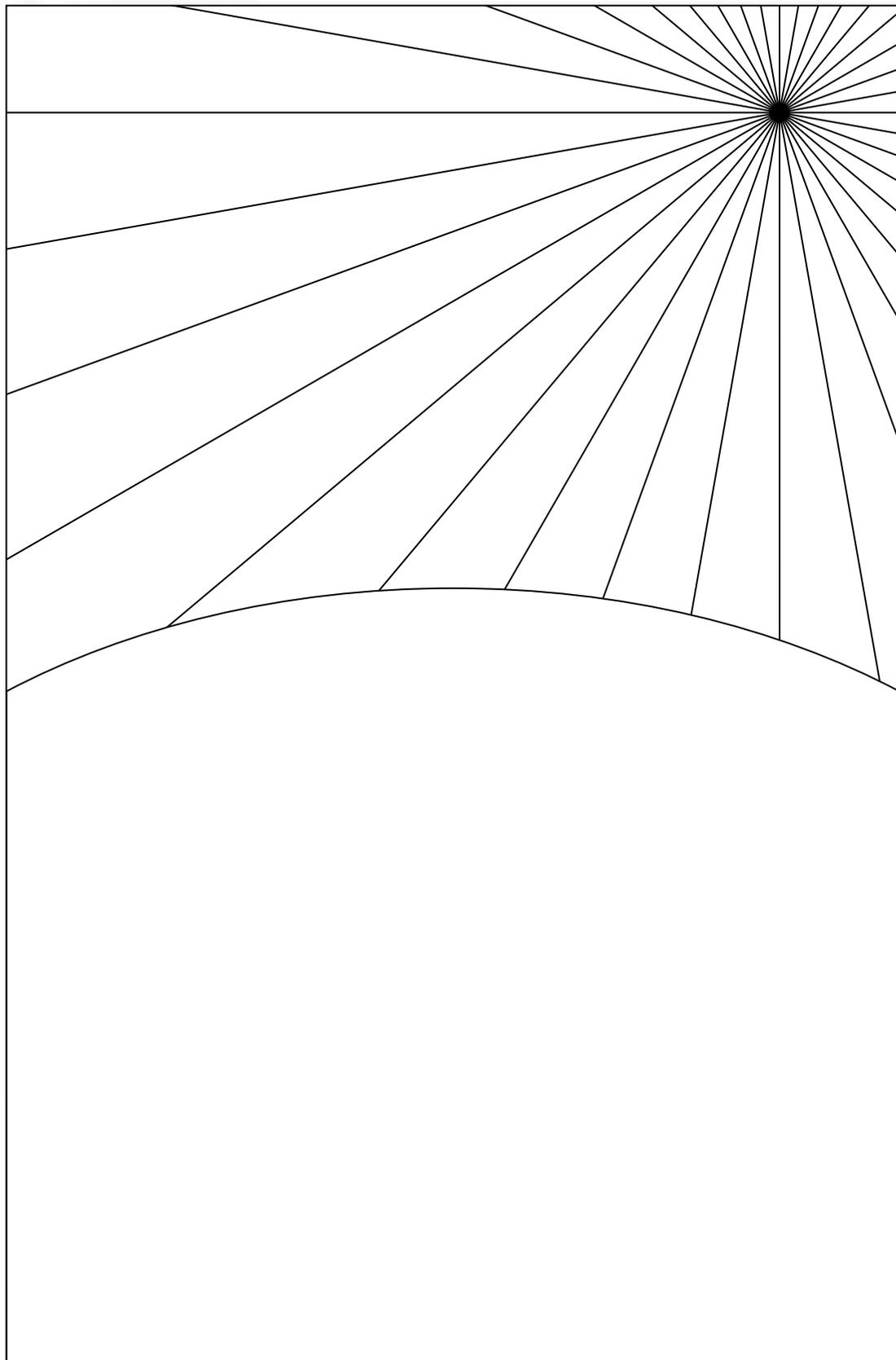
I have an Aussie-Joburg-Glaswegian-  
Torontonian-Chilango-Chicano fake DNA  
that speaks Spanglish and the slang of la locura.

In post-apartheid South Africa marked by a  
black and white binary, the Mestizo Latino became  
the odd and unrecognizable object.

El "mariachi-zombie de Culiacán," nude con una penca de maguey en el  
pito y un gran sombrero de mariachi against the organized crime in Mexico.

Auto-exiled from Mexico, lonely immigrant, post-national-post-Mexican and re-  
verse wetback activist coming from the far north.

Canadian-Mexican-Canadian-Latino-Canadian-Spanish, Filipino, Indian (from India) and for  
some even British WTF!!!??? and in Norway? A MexViking?



I  
practiced  
sexual  
performance  
anonymously,  
role-playing with  
unknown people  
in unthinkable places...  
like hip galleries  
and  
governmental museums.

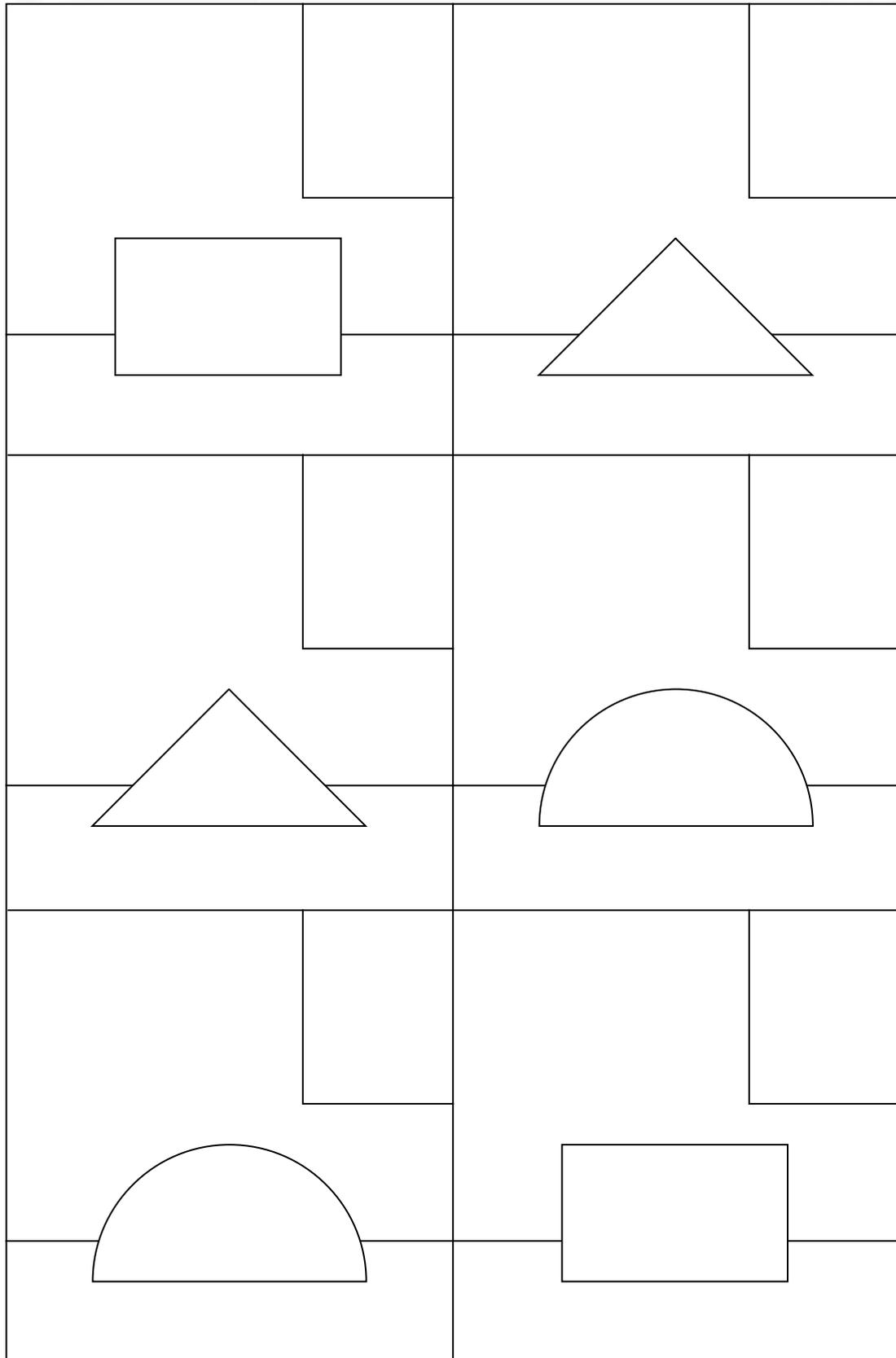
I like to decompress with a margarita  
in hand in mental institutions. Bipolar crises  
1.0 Mexico, 2.0 South Africa 3.0 SA, 4.0 SA lon-  
gest stay in a psychiatric hospital, 5.0 Scotland,  
6.1, Canada 6.1.2 USA-SF, 6.1.3 and 6.1.4 Canada  
and counting...

ChiCA-Nadian, Chica-no, Chica-si, Mexquimo, OxfordVato, po-  
lite-Mexican, polite-Chicano.

When I go back to Mexico City, I am Colombian, Puerto Rican, Cuban,  
Chicano, or Peruvian, but not Mexican anymore!

My cultural hybrid chromosome has sometimes rendered me invisible. I have had  
fake identities imposed by dominant and "pure" cultures. I have been welcomed with  
a "high and mighty" postcolonial apologetic undertone that overrode the specificities  
of my ethnic origins.

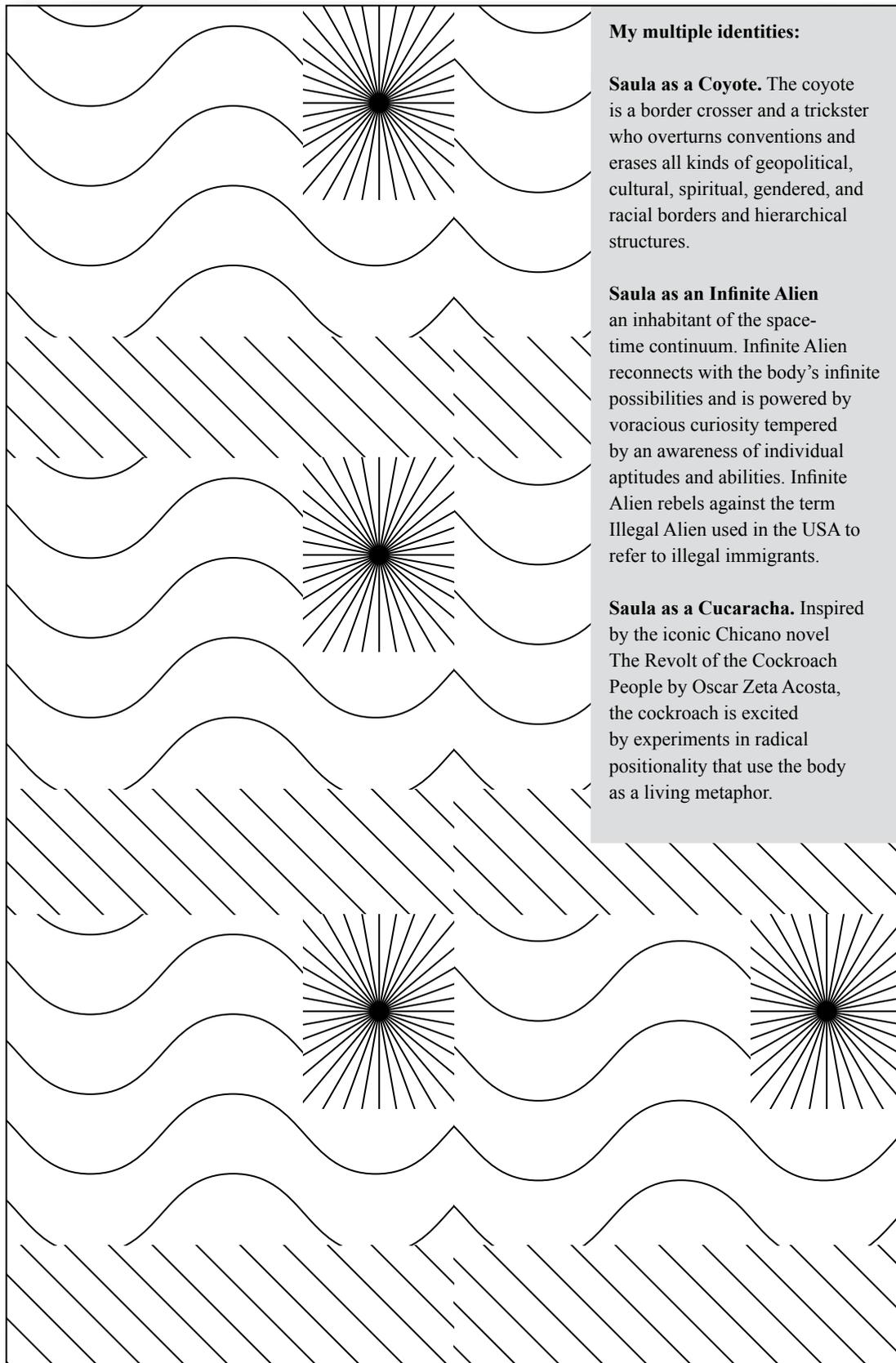
My identity, just like yours, continues to be a work in progress...



**Live Art as  
political diplomacy**

**Transition 3.2**

Listen...Cambio...I climb into  
performance as a vehicle  
to cross my borders  
and test new fronteras,  
performance as a seductive  
and sensual power, as  
colonial exorcism,  
as symbolic cannibalism for  
identity reincarnation.



**My multiple identities:**

**Saula as a Coyote.** The coyote is a border crosser and a trickster who overturns conventions and erases all kinds of geopolitical, cultural, spiritual, gendered, and racial borders and hierarchical structures.

**Saula as an Infinite Alien** an inhabitant of the space-time continuum. Infinite Alien reconnects with the body's infinite possibilities and is powered by voracious curiosity tempered by an awareness of individual aptitudes and abilities. Infinite Alien rebels against the term Illegal Alien used in the USA to refer to illegal immigrants.

**Saula as a Cucaracha.** Inspired by the iconic Chicano novel *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* by Oscar Zeta Acosta, the cockroach is excited by experiments in radical positionality that use the body as a living metaphor.

I constantly gather powerful tools to dislocate stereotypes and to conceive and forge my personal, ongoing process of decolonization.

I believe in the reemerge of ARTivism out of a purposeful clash between various influences, aesthetics, cultures, iconographies, attitudes, and social media that are specific to the post-globalization and post-democratic era we live in.

I am the last front line of the X Generation and the oldest Millennial. I grew up between the hope of the tech revolution and its monopolization by corporations.

Get real! borders are material expressions of imposed limits. They are real, dangerous, change place over time, and seem to disappear when the collective desire for freedom overpowers them.

**A personal dream**

I am a Mexican with Mariachi hat and Nike sneakers entering to the brand new Multicultural Disney theme park in Florida. My tourist guide is a "traditional" viking that speaks spanish with a Norwegian accent, weird!

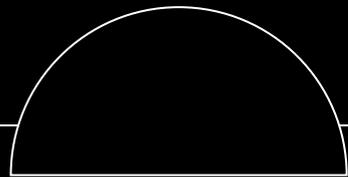
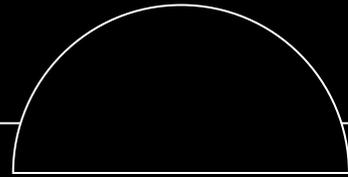
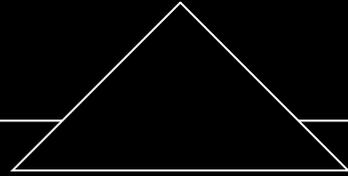
I see an add in the main entrance:

**"Welcome to Performance Art Intergalactic"**

You are entering a planetary system where performance art is live technology. You will experience identity vertigo. Please, surrender to the experience and enjoy being emancipated from the tyranny of your boring everyday life.

**Warning:** This dream can only happen if you interconnect with your community, ancestors, allies and the rebel artists around the world.

What the f\*ck!



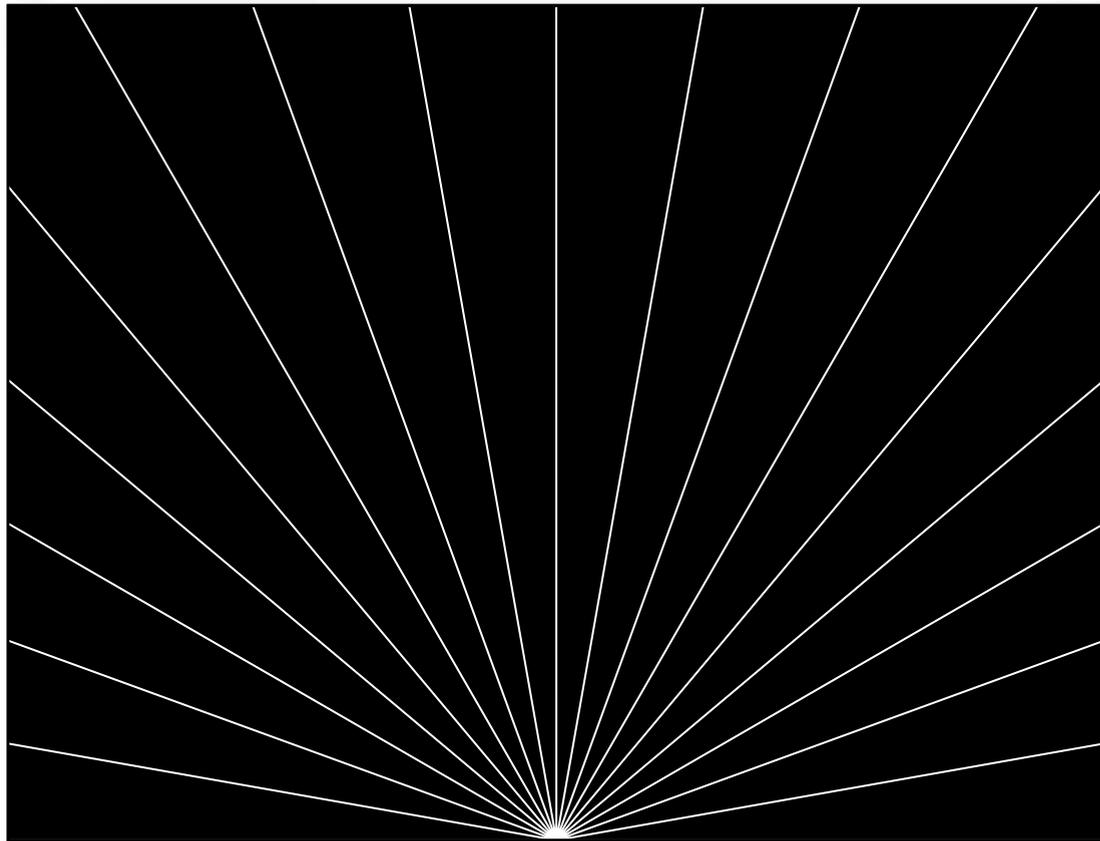
I am sandwiched between the false political hopes of the late '90s, the end of the belief that politicians will save us, the collapse of old political structures, and the rise of corporate totalitarianism.

I am a witness here in the west of the social media surgical procedure of the demonization of the east and south.

I live in a post-democratic time, where political figures are products of reality shows.

By queering repressive and imposed limits, we embrace the possibility of imagining a new territory, a new fluid frontier beyond all fixed, problematic and dangerous borders.

I fight against the centripetal/hierarchical/patriarchal punishments that limit my body's potential as a powerful, ancestral, and authentic technology for transformation.



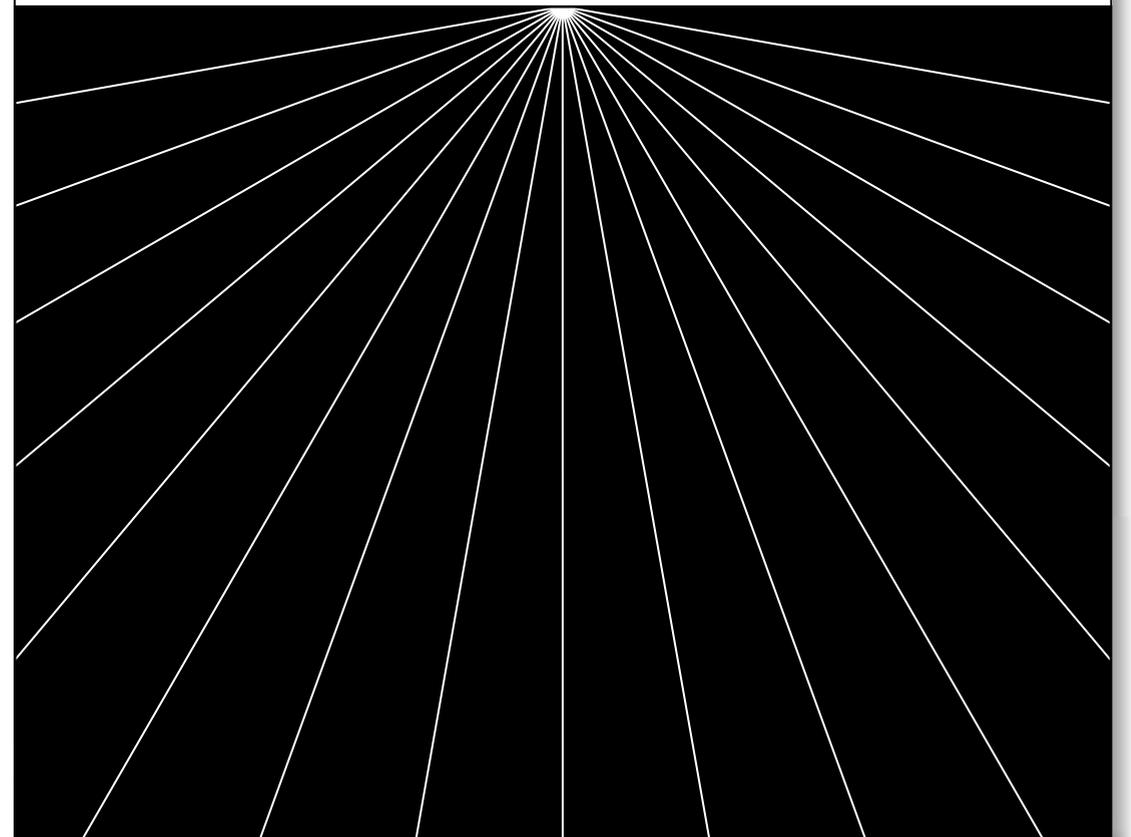
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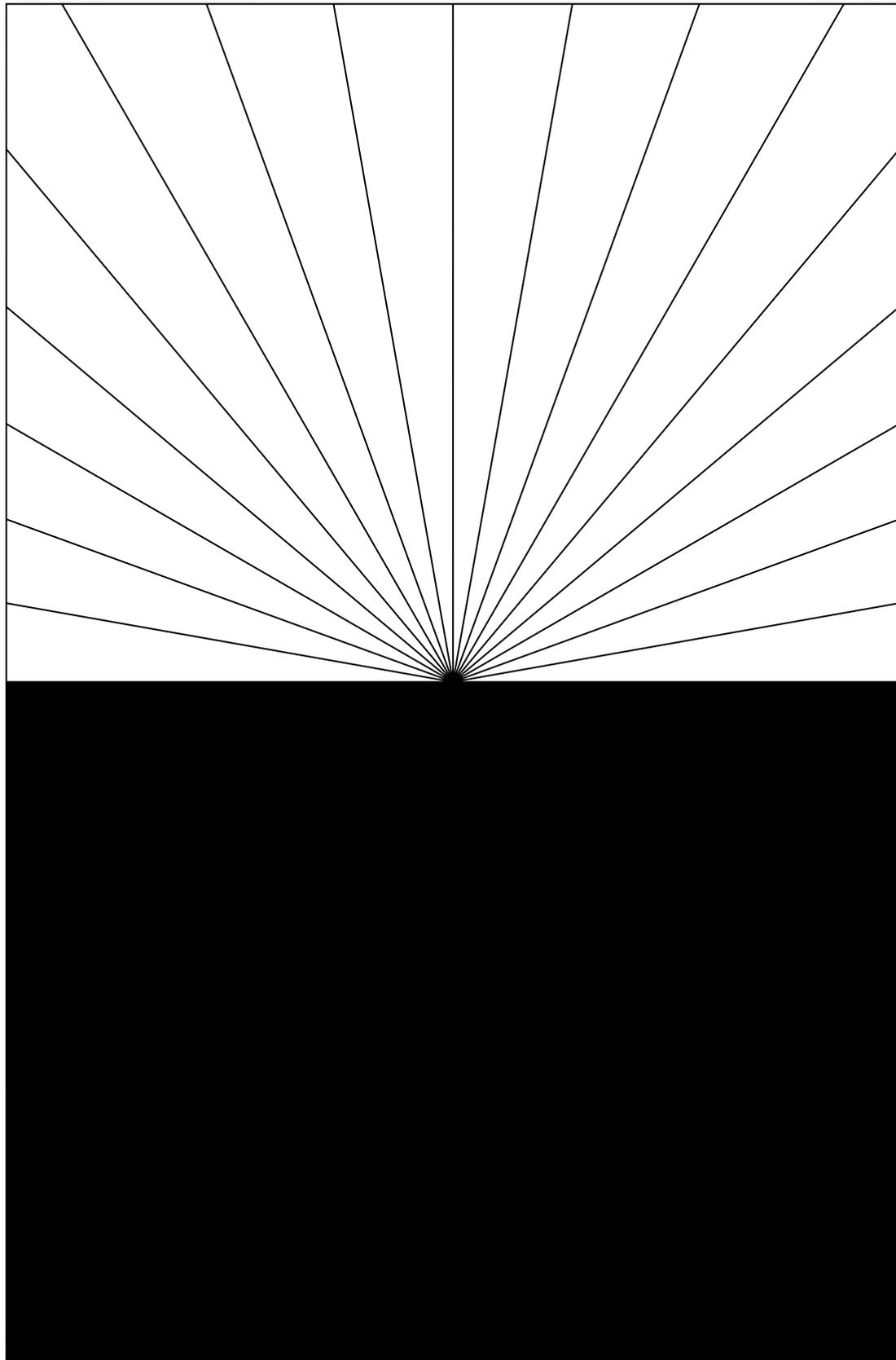
Episode  
2011–2020  
A Chicano quantic  
journey into performance art

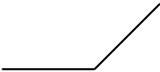
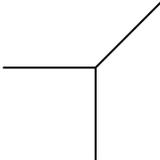
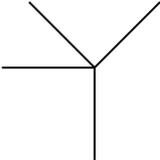
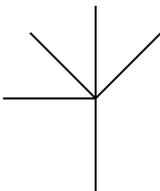
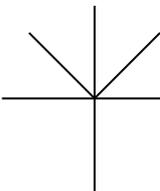
Live Pedagogy  
as Radical Intimacy  
and Artivism

I have been able to establish a connective axis  
that brings new alignment to my complex identity,  
ambiguous accent, gender fluidity, and the historical,  
physical and imaginary markers of my body.

I am outraged by the routine of catastrophic trauma,  
far-right politics,  
and the social shortcomings of globalization.





I believe in a multilevel, poly-linguistic type of pedagogy in which we are constantly shifting and sampling roles, languages, and leadership and mixing exercises in ever-evolving ways.

Performing the Bermuda triangle with my macabre sister Balitronica Gomez, my performance godmother Guillermo Gomez-Peña, and me, pure rock and roll and electronic cumbia!

I decided to not be blind to the text embodied and directly written, or drawn on my skin by my ancestors.

I aim to create new territories where collective and individual rituals, shamanism, psicomagia, conceptual cannibalism, and radical spirituality serve as creative catalyzers to exorcise social and personal trauma.

**My performace anatomy:**

**Organ one:** controls and directs my gaze while in performance mode

**Organ two:** activates collective creation

**Organ three:** ignates conceptual and poetic images

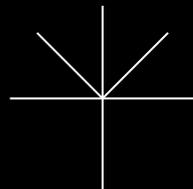
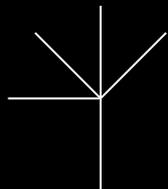
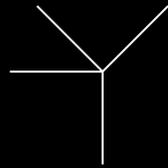
**Organ four:** pushes out the bulk of the creative sessions to turn them into living practice

**Organ five:** generates the enzyme to “stylize”, refine, “sharp out”, activate, embody and develop performance actions

**Organ siXXX:** OK Next! I have “forgotten”...

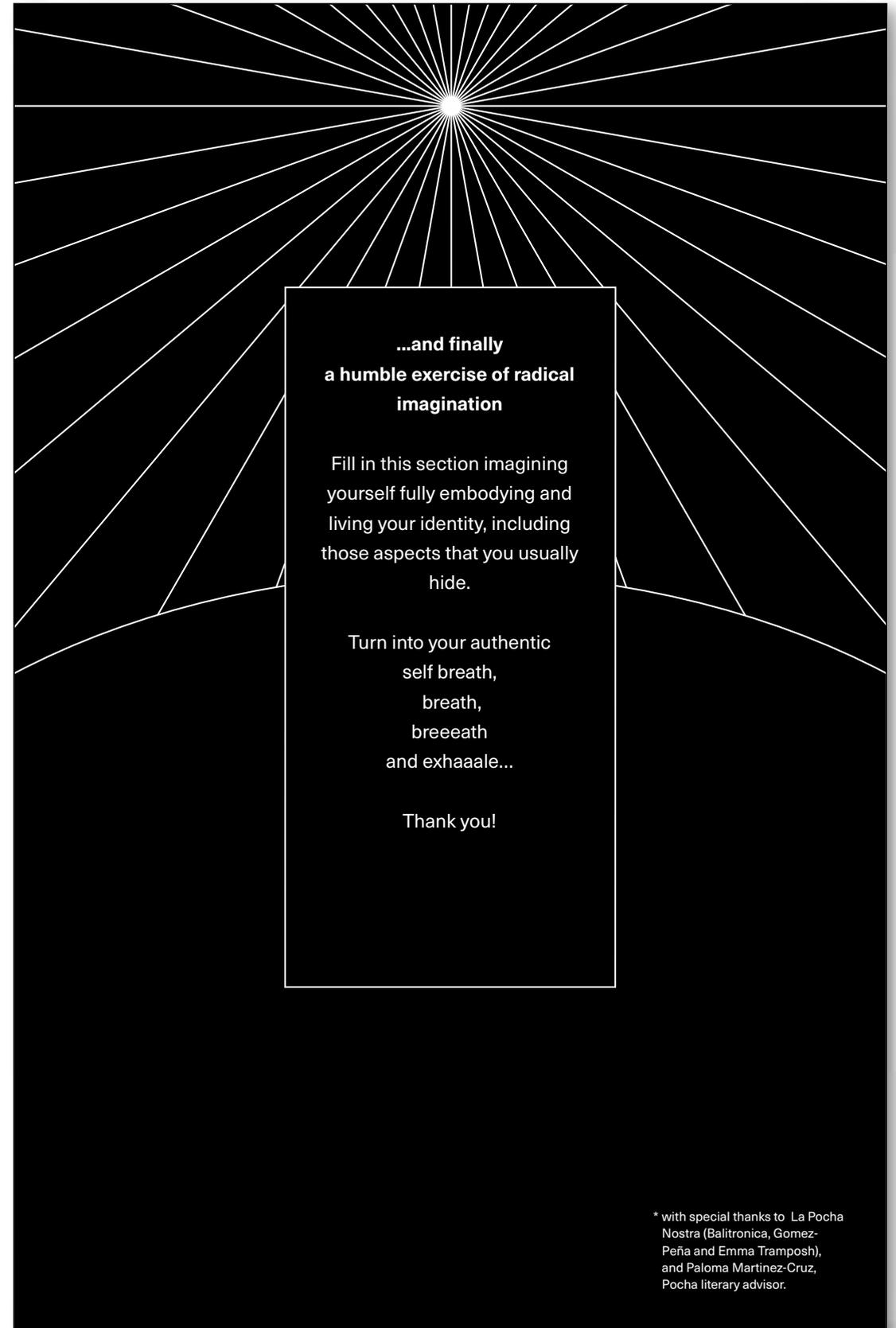
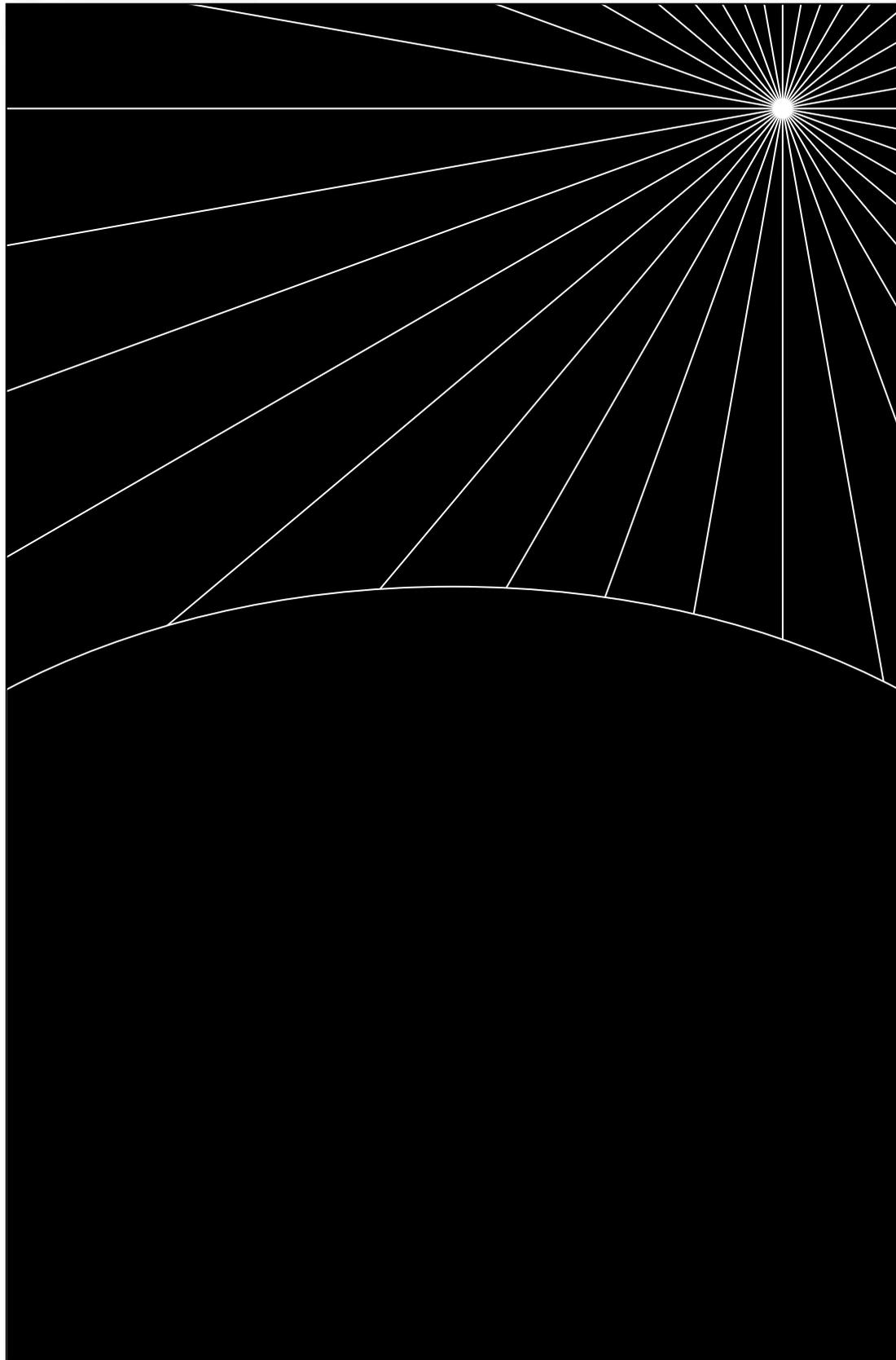
**Organ Seven:** brings the art practice to the public in everyday life

**Organ eight:** is a day-by-day tourist guide suggesting ways of combining and sampling my creative ideas



It is in this territory of the social challenge, and the anti-binary, queer re-negotiation of the self where I discover a clumsy but effective democracy.

I believe in the living matrix of Radical Intimacy crystallized by imagination, listening and tenderness to reach beyond our geopolitical and self-induced borders.



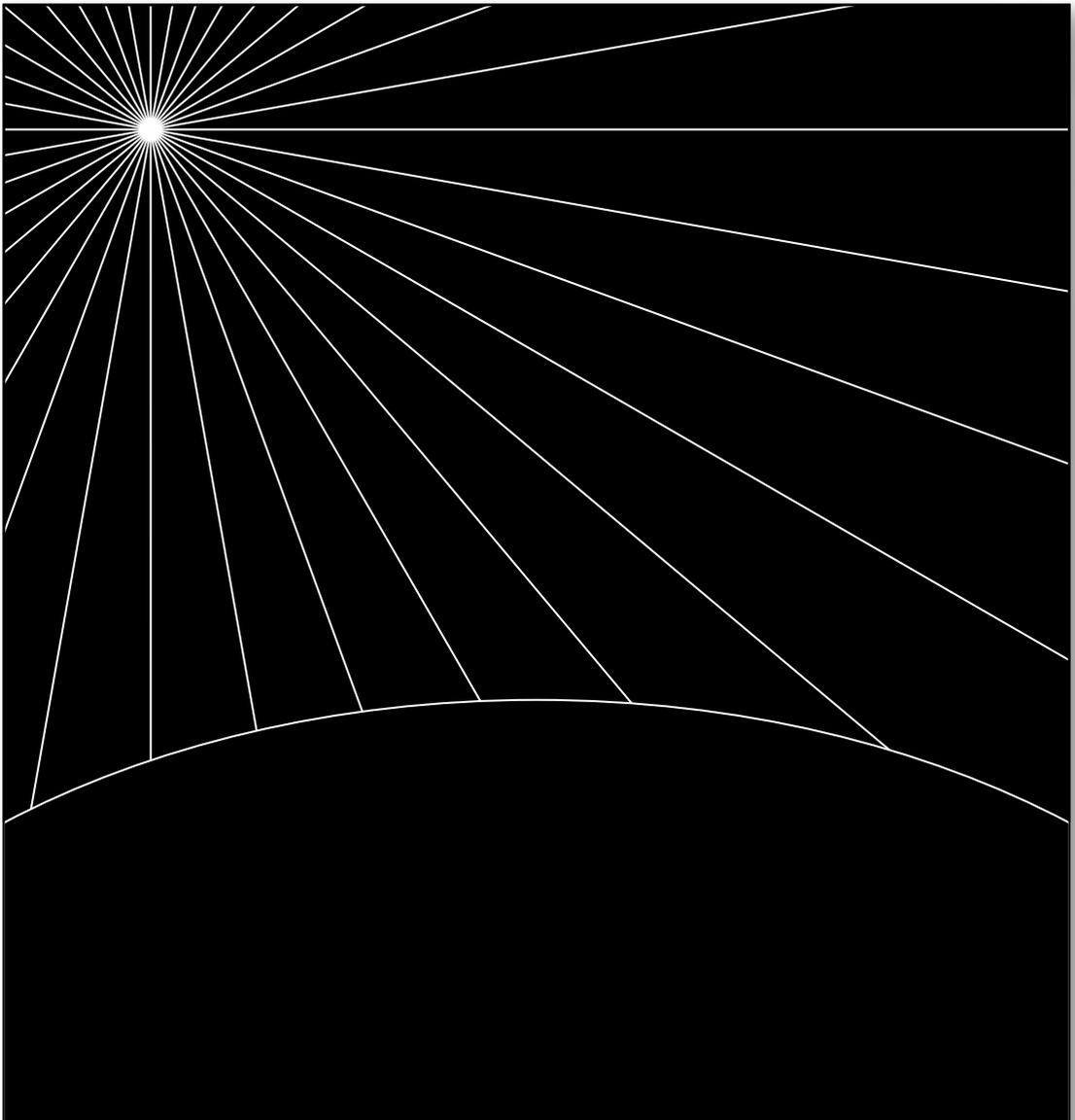
**...and finally  
a humble exercise of radical  
imagination**

Fill in this section imagining  
yourself fully embodying and  
living your identity, including  
those aspects that you usually  
hide.

Turn into your authentic  
self breath,  
breath,  
breeeath  
and exhaaaale...

Thank you!

\* with special thanks to La Pocha  
Nostra (Balitronica, Gomez-  
Peña and Emma Tramposh),  
and Paloma Martinez-Cruz,  
Pocha literary advisor.



*An ARTivist manifesto for a post-democratic society* is a commissioned manifest that blurs the boundaries of gender, identity, culture, art, activism, and national borders.

Saul Garcia-Lopez, aka La Saula, is a performance artist, radical performance director, scholar, pedagogue, and co-artistic director of La Pocha Nostra. He explores the intersections of acting and performance pedagogy, indigenous strategies of performance practice, ethnicity, gender, post-coloniality, and indigeneity. He is a guest assistant professor at the Norwegian Theatre Academy at Østfold University College.

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Ingvild Langgård,  
Signe Becker and  
Alette Schei Rørvik

Dudzile Mathonsi

Trond Reinholdtsen

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