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BECKET MWN AND AIMÉE ZITO LEMA · THE ACTRESS(ES)

Apr 19, 2023 · Some Curatorial Process Notes, Megan Hoetger

## Remnants and Reflections

*A director and an untrained actress in her mid-twenties meet in a black box in Buenos Aires in the winter of 2020. Over the course of one day, the director coaches the actress to perform a three-page highly self-reflexive poetic monologue translated into Spanish. The process of learning to embody a character who herself is questioning what it means to be an embodied "I" unfolds in a documented rehearsal.*

*A director and a trained teen actress meet in a black box in Amsterdam in the summer of 2021. Over the course of two days, the director coaches the actress to perform the same three-page monologue in its original English version. The process of learning to embody a character who herself is questioning what it means to be an embodied "I" unfolds in another documented rehearsal.*

This is the basic set-up for Becket MWN and Aimée Zito Lema's *The Actress*, a process-based video installation (<https://archiv.steirischerherbst.at/en/projects/27620/grazer-kunstverein>), which was first presented in Fall 2021 at the Grazer Kunstverein, Austria under the artistic direction of Kate Strain. The project is, as Strain wrote in her curatorial text, "a live investigation of a thinking process, in search of a moment when thinking is distracted or displaced, by memorized words and speech acts, to the point of performative transformation". In the four-channel installation, this process is visualized from two perspectives, that of the camera filming the rehearsal process and that of the actress rehearsing with a director in front of a film crew. With the rehearsal process screened in projection and the actress' view screened on a monitor behind the projection, viewers are offered an inside/outside visual perspective on what that "thinking process" looks like and possible moments of "performative transformation". And this offering is doubled: it appears once in English in

the context of the Amsterdam rehearsal and once in Spanish in the context of the Buenos Aires rehearsal. All with German subtitles.

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In October 2020, one year before the video installation in Graz opened, I joined *The Actress* as a curatorial interlocutor, engaging in conceptual dialogue with Becket and Zito Lema around the performative and theoretical framework developed in/through their project; and also, at key moments, supporting their on-site performance production work in Amsterdam. In a twist on the casting call, together we interviewed directors in the spring of 2020; and, a few months later, we came together to be part of the Amsterdam rehearsal. I am in fact implicated in the thinking process *The Actress* rehearses for the camera – viewers of installation can see me in the go-pro footage filmed from the perspective of the 13-year-old actress in Amsterdam. Along with Becket, Zito Lema and the film crew, my act of observation there played its own role in the formation of the speaking apparatus, or the speaking “I” – an apparatus we might imagine as emerging from the triangulation of such acts of observation from others; the embodiment of thinking that is addressed in the script; and the performance in speech of this embodiment of thinking through the rehearsal process. With each layer of translation and mediation, the artists’ investigation into speech, memory and movement becomes more entangled in questions of representation and performativity that traverse writing, reading, speaking, acting, rehearsing, curating and documenting.

Along the way, Becket, Zito Lema and I have discussed several slippages that their project works in, often through the practice of the rehearsal itself. There were enigmatic slippages in language within the text, between description and speculation, metaphoric and concrete phrase, internal and external speech. There were generative slippages in the translation of the text, placing unanticipated importance on the movement between cultural contexts and collective memories. There were silly slippages in speaking the text, the clumsiness of syllabically complex words held in the mouth of a teenager. And there were also interdisciplinary slippages between the protocols of the theatre stage and the film set, between the conceptual tactics of an experimental visual artist and those of an experimental theatre maker. Over the course of Becket and Zito Lema’s year-long production process, *The Actress* became an expanded experiment that traversed the shared disciplinary edges of theater, film, and the visual arts, placing at the forefront the act of translation – of one language into another, of a language into a body, of a theater rehearsal into a performance video. In the studio, *The Actress* becomes *The Actress(es)*. Here Becket and Zito Lema take the opportunity to go back, open up and extend their research process, lingering on the “roads not taken” in the development of their project.

Open-ended research may take its form in the moment of presentation – as theirs did in Graz – but, as the artists explore, there are a multiplicity of projects living in any single project. As the title of their studio room

suggests, there are also a multiplicity of “actresses” living inside any single character. Once again there is a slippage. The embodiment of the research process mirrors and reflects that of the “I” upon whom the actresses pondered in their respective rehearsals. As the two women were coached by their directors to memorize their monologue and find movement-based points of connection with the character speaking it, they enacted the potential multiplicities to which Becket and Zito Lema speak in the studio. A little over a year after the film installation’s exhibition, the duo has gathered together remnants from and reflections on their work, including a series of annotated scripts from the rehearsal processes in Buenos Aires and Amsterdam, as well as interview materials from different stages of their process and featuring new short essays by Becket. Alongside the text-based materials, they also share film fragments, production stills and behind-the-scenes footage, which unpack different elements from their research and production moments. Sharing the selected remnants from their working materials and reflecting upon them through the lenses of translation, theater and film, *The Actresses(es)* traces the sprawling performative field(s) of subject interpellation that *The Actress* has – and continues to – traverse.

Amsterdam, April 2023

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*The Actress* was co-produced by *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution* together with the Grazer Kunstverein and steirischer herbst '21 (Graz), with financial support from the Mondriaan Fund and the Stichting Dommering Fund.

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### *About Becket MWN*

Becket MWN is an Amsterdam-based writer and artist, originally from the United States. He received his MFA from the University of Southern California in 2014 and was a resident artist at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam from 2015 to 2017. Recent works have focused on the relation between mimesis, media, and the inorganic gothic, taking form as text, audio, and sculpture. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include *The Tail* (Brussels, BE), *Kevin Space* (Vienna, AT), *Kunstverein Graz* (Graz, AT). For *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want to be Part of Your Revolution* he co-edited the *Event and Duration* reader with Susan Gibb. His writing often appears under the name Becket Flannery, and he has been commissioned by S.M.A.K. (Ghent, BE), *Revue Initiales* (ENSBA, Lyon, FR), *Metropolis M* (Amsterdam, NL), and *Public Fiction* (Los Angeles, US).

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### *About Aimée Zito Lema*

Aimée Zito Lema (1982, Amsterdam, NL) is a Dutch-Argentinean visual artist. Both research-based and intuitive, Zito Lema works with archival material and personal memory. Her projects seek to investigate history as it is passed through generations, and in turn, as a tool to rethink the present. Growing up between Argentina and the Netherlands, Zito Lema is influenced by movements: of the body in space, across geographies; and of the past into the present. She studied at the National University of Arts in Buenos Aires and graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. She holds a master's degree in Artistic Research from the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, and was a resident at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam (2015–16). Her work has been exhibited at Oude Kerk, Amsterdam (2021); Grazer Kunstverein (2021); Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam (2019); Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon (2018); MACBA, Barcelona (2017); the 11th Gwangju Biennial (2016); and Centre Pompidou, Paris (2016).