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Beyond the Limits

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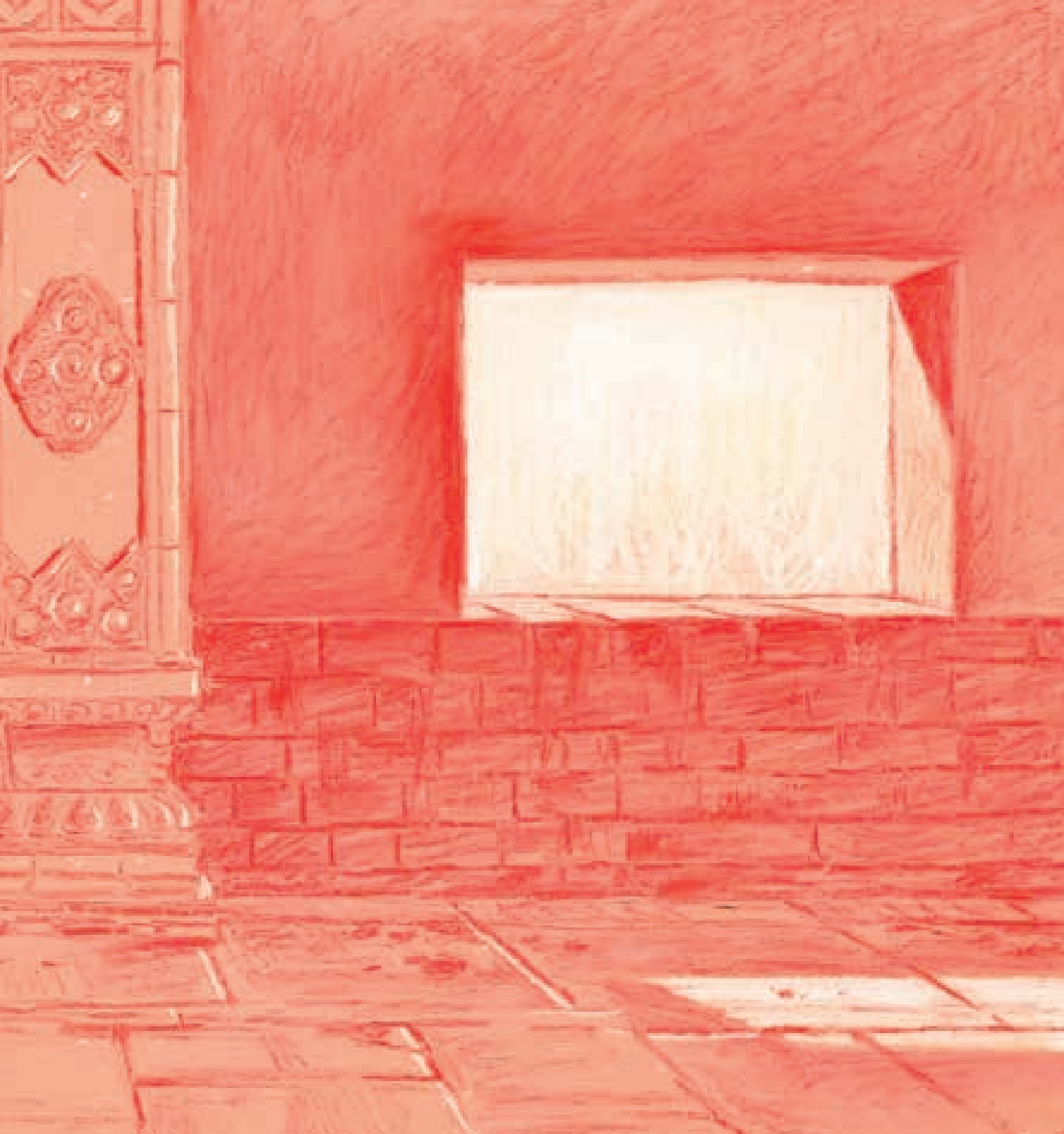
MASTERPIECES
OF CHINESE
PAINTING
in the
FORBIDDEN CITY

Open Borders, Blurred Boundaries

The images featured on the following pages are by Zurich-based artist Matthias Gnehm. They were inspired by his own travels through China, an experience that included various encounters with borders. On the one hand, Gnehm's drawings evoke the boundaries between countries, cultures and languages. On the other hand,



they convey a series of distinctions: between here and there, seeing and being seen, image and text, legal and illegal, the comic and the serious. Gnehm's images thus provide an additional perspective on the themes of this issue of *Passages*, as they are taken up by the authors featured here.

2–31 DOSSIER

Beyond the Limits

The images that accompany this issue's thematic dossier were created by Matthias Gnehm. Based in Zurich, Gnehm (b. 1970) received his degree in architecture from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich). Since 1999 he has worked as a freelance architect and a comics artist. His books have been published in German and French, and his work has been shown in exhibitions around the world. His most recent book, *Die kopierte Stadt* ("the copied city"), was published in 2014 by Edition Hochparterre with support from a Pro Helvetia Work Grant. The story takes place in Zurich and Kunming. As part of his research, Gnehm also visited the Forbidden City in Beijing. His experiences there are playfully reflected in the drawings he created for *Passages*.
www.matthiasgnehm.ch

Where Are Our Borders?

Whether they are being drawn, reinforced or dissolved: borders are an unavoidable part of life. But which borders do we mean? Towering barbed-wire fences carving a landscape into two separate countries? Or the borders within the European Union, now barely perceptible to most travellers? The limits of economic growth? Or the limitations of what can be thought or done? In these pages, the theatre critic Alexandre Demidoff describes the ongoing dissolution of the traditional division between the audience and the stage. Sociologist Richard Sennett makes the case for more porous boundaries within cities. Game journalist John Gaudiosi tests the cutting- edge flight simulator *Birdly,* and wonders whether the future of the film industry will be found in immersive video game experiences. Art critic Laurent Wolf looks at the history of transgressive art and its struggle against the limitations of both the social order and the artist's own body.

Borders also play a decisive role when it comes to Pro Helvetia's manifold activities. Through its grants for translations, the Arts Council helps overcome linguistic boundaries within Switzerland and abroad. With its expansion into the areas of digital culture and design, Pro Helvetia has been steadily breaking new ground. Its support for interdisciplinary practice helps to bring artistic sectors together. And in carrying out its mission to support and promote Swiss art and culture throughout the world, Pro Helvetia is involved in cross-border exchange by definition.

This issue of *Passages* tackles a vast topic whose borders may indeed seem blurred. But we hope that the beacons assembled here will illuminate some of its diverse aspects and inspire our readers to unbridled reflection and discussion.

Alexandra von Arx
Managing Editor, *Passages*

Of Borders and Boundaries

Richard Sennett is one of the foremost contemporary thinkers on cities, labour and culture. An eclectic social scientist who divides his time between New York, London and other locations, he is particularly interested in questions of diversity and complexity.

By Anne McElvoy

Richard Sennett looks a bit like an academically-inclined Homer Simpson, with a ready grin and a large, bald domed head – "for keeping his multiple brains in," quips a colleague. The Centennial Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics (LSE) occupies a prestigious corner office in a building called the Tower, in small maze of LSE buildings just off the Strand. Like the man himself, it is an eclectic mixture, rather than an ivory-tower retreat. Orderly piles of journals and books are arrayed on the shelves; a table is strewn with visiting cards from the many wayfarers who come to consult Sennett on his wide range of expertise and enthusiasms. These range from the fate of courtesy in modern societies, to the contemporary workplace, the curse of ring roads and how to improve town planning – as well as a habit of masterminding events and cross-fertilizations, like his latest project, Theatrum Mundi, which brings artists, planners and policy-makers together to puzzle over how to make our urban spaces more benign.

From hard boundaries to porous borders

What is preoccupying him now? "The edges between communities in cities," Sennett says. He is fascinated by the theme of borders and boundaries and their impact on nation states, cities and individuals. He says he started out thinking as a sociologist about how modern cities work, with their tensions and their diversity. "I am very clear that blacks and whites, Christians and Muslims should live together, and that this is a desirable way to live and better for everyone in the end." But he likes mutations of academic subjects and cross-fertilizations with other disciplines. "So I stepped back from the practical problems and started to ask some biologists what they thought. They came up with a distinction between a border, which is like a cell membrane – resistant, but porous – and a boundary, a cell wall, which is more impermeable and hard to penetrate."

He thinks cities need to shift the way they order themselves, from hard boundaries to more porous borders between communities. "We have highways that divide communities absolutely between between rich and poor. We create college campuses which are thoroughly isolated from their surroundings. We let our High Streets stop being places of mixed use. It's such a bad idea!" A border, Sennett reckons, is "a place of life. A boundary is a place which says to you 'Don't go here – we've put up an invisible wall'."

You can spot these modern city boundaries in the moribund areas of cities – and not just the urban wastelands of poorly-designed flyovers or no-go areas around tower blocks for the poor. When I ask for an example, Sennett cites the Barbican in London, an upmarket residential network of flats on the edge of the financial district. The nearby areas around the Museum of London, which draws in visitors by the thousand, is a "dead, empty space." He has been working on a design project to remedy that. He's also learned from looking at global examples of how cities demarcate themselves. In Latin America, he helped design a clinic in Chile, for mainly low-income patients. "The thinking was to put it in the heart of the community. It turned out not to be the right idea. I realized we should have put it on the edge of the poor part of the city, so that middle-class people would also use it. Because having both communities using it was a better way to ensure high standards than siting it away from the better-off neighbourhoods."

An eclectic mix

In an academic world prone to driving intellectuals into ever-narrower fiefdoms, Sennett is defiantly broad in his sweep. His first qualification was in American civilization, but he moved swiftly into the nascent field of urban studies, combining his interests in sociology, culture and identity. Cities fascinate him. He has written books on public culture and public space in London, Paris, and New York in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and on Renaissance urban design as the root of modern city planning.

That specialism would be enough to keep many of the professorial classes occupied. But Sennett also writes extensively on the workplace and its effect on culture and conduct. His recent book *The Craftsman* (2008) struck a nerve at a time when prosperous societies are driven to work harder, faster (and often cheaper) to keep up with everyone else doing the same. Sennett explored the submerged urges and satisfactions of crafting things slowly – and the anthropological roots of that need.

Sennett says his experience of growing up in a housing estate in Chicago, where the question of racial assimilation of blacks and whites was never far from the surface, has given him a lifelong commitment to "different classes and types of people living together rather than in separate zones." I point out that when councils use the words "a vibrant social mix," many residents think it disguises problems or tensions, or sweeps uncomfortable differences aside. The big shift in living patterns across the world is, after all, suburbanization. And regardless of the advice of academics, just as many people flee diversity in communities as aspire to embrace it. Sennett responds: "I don't object to people wanting a

sweet environment to live in. But I do think that kids should learn to manage their environment. And for all the appeal of suburbia, there are as many bored suburban kids as there are disaffected ones in cities." He cites the instability and ethnic tensions of the Paris *banlieues* as an example of a division of French communities that has ended unhappily and looks hard to repair.

Public and private spheres

The major preoccupation for our societies, he thinks, is how cultural and faith groups can live happily together. "Do we really think it will work out in any of our cities if, say, Muslims keep to themselves, or 'true' Germans stay apart from the immigrants in their midst? We have to learn to deal with complexity, because that is what we have." Politically, this can feel a little glib: people do make choices about their lives which are not solely the remit of a benign planner. But he does not mind me calling him a "statist" because he thinks that markets cannot sensibly allocate planning well.

Sennett is a prime intervener in the way cities should be laid out, but he has a rather different take on the public and private spheres, in the era of Snapchat and Facebook. "The border between public and private is a place where there should be a hard boundary, rather than a soft one. I object to sharing of private information, so I won't go on Facebook out of principle. Displaying your private sphere to strangers is not a good thing. The sense of what is public and what is rightly private is being lost." Of course this might just be the voice of a man of a certain age (he's an energetic sixty-two). "Yes, he concedes, "It is a bit of a generational divide. But when we expose too much of our private lives, we lose virtues like tact and reserve – and I think they do matter, actually."

Sennett's book *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (1998) struck a chord because it reflected a nagging concern about how work has moved from being a source of stability and identity to an uncertain and shifting thing. This has left many in what he calls the "New Capitalism" of a globalized world "more adrift and anxious than they would care to admit. Changing economic structures, more free-flowing labour and technology challenge ways of being, as well as ways of earning."

Is there a nub of technophobia here? Google's working culture does not appeal to him. "It's wonderful you can do everything in their HQ, but it also means you can lose yourself if there is no division between working and outside life." He dislikes "the brutal functionality of work online." He was, he says wrily, one of Google's academic testers in a project a couple of years ago, intended to create an online communication and cooperation network to come up with solutions to policy headaches. It did not work out: in part, Sennett reckons, "because looking at engagement online tended to magnify big themes, but push less popular concerns aside," and "that's not really how inquiry should proceed." He is unlikely to volunteer for the role of digital guinea pig again.

Working things through

Does the high priest of urban studies practise what he preaches when it comes to his own residential life? "You won't find me in one of those suburbs with big blocks of department stores," he

laughs. On moving to the LSE in the 1990s, he bought a loft conversion in the old diamond district in London, then deemed a bit dreary. He lives there with his partner Saskia Sassen, a sociologist at Columbia University who studies globalization. The two form a high-powered, convivial couple and run what one visitor calls "a perpetual trans-Atlantic salon." "One advantage of coming from New York was that I understood about living in lofts and using room dividers," he says. "And pretty much everyone, including the mortgage brokers, thought I was mad." The neighbourhood is now one of the more sought-after parts of the city, in an area that mixes shops, banking and residential use.

Sennett is a thinker who embodies the blurred boundaries between cultural fields, between work and home, between cities and countries. A gifted musician (he still plays cello), he studied at the Juilliard School of music but ended up working on a degree in the history of civilization at Harvard. He keeps stretching the limits of his subject into the arts and architecture. He is a genial figure, and I wonder if anything angers him. He says he is frustrated by the "lumpen" response from European governments to immigration problems. "I have bright students from abroad struggling to get visas because the government is worried about some migration target it won't meet anyway. The nation-state deals with border problems in such clunky ways. I know, it's hard to change the politics of it. But there are a lot of other ways to work through things and stuff you thought couldn't be changed. It turns out it can. That's the cheerful part."

Anne McElvoy is senior editor at *The Economist,* specializing in public policy. She is also a political columnist, and regularly presents programmes for BBC radio. Born in the north-east of England, she read German and Philosophy at Oxford and the Humboldt University in Berlin.

Richard Sennett (b. 1943) is University Professor of the Humanities at New York University and Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His books include *The Fall of Public Man (1977), Flesh and Stone (1992), The Culture of the New Capitalism (2006), and Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation (2012).* www.richardsennett.com

The Viewer Plays the Leading Role

What if the audience were cast as part of the play? From theatre to dance, artists invite their viewers to join the performance, erasing the boundary between the stage and the seats.

By Alexandre Demidoff

From time to time, the theatre becomes a game in which we are invited to participate. Take that stormy night in August 2003, at the Centre d'art contemporain in Geneva: an audience of some sixty people were seated in a loft-like room when, by a marvellous coincidence, a stroke of lightning exposed a recumbent figure lying flat against a slab. It was the dancer and performer La Ribot, wrapped in a shroud. She began to tremble, as if the victim of an electric shock. Then she stood up, revealing a long, skinny figure reminiscent of a sylph. Her miraculously resuscitated body had everyone riveted. She went on as if being strangled by a fine cord – only to again come back to life. Next she exhibited herself in the altogether, with three Polaroid pictures atop her breasts and pubis. Change after change ensued in thirty-four sketches: these the artist entitled *Piezas Distinguidas* ("Distinguished Pieces"). The greatest originality of it all is that each of us, you or I, could buy any of her pieces to be performed anew whenever we wished. On the evening in question – a part of Geneva's La Bâtie Festival programme – La Ribot was performing a production on tour throughout Europe, in galleries and theatres.

Breaking the fourth wall

Another example. The Grü in Geneva is an experimental theatre brilliantly directed and programmed, from 2006 to 2012, by Maya Bösch of Zurich and Michèle Pralong from the Valais area. In the fall of 2006, some dozen people were invited to take their seats on a tree trunk, as if in the middle of a forest. At one's feet, a floor strewn with wood shavings. In front of the viewers, a film screen showing six young people in a chalet, sleeping off the blues. One of the six takes off along a deserted road, then dives into a lake. Does this all sound strange to you? The film by Frédéric Lombard is the preamble to *Utzgur!,* a show by Anna Van Brée of Belgium, who works as a costume and stage designer in French-speaking Switzerland. End of Act I. Followed by a new venue that has one seated in a hall bathed by neon lights and sparsely furnished with other tree trunks, a few benches. The spectators sit down wherever they wish. Strangers – in fact, the actors – wander about among the audience. Their mouths spew forth pieces of text: a sort of logbook, an agglomeration of thoughts and events, all written by Mathieu Bertholet, an author from the canton of Valais. Fragments of text fly about, inviting one and all to catch them in mid-air.

Not that these two pieces were composed in the same fashion. The first one is culturally affiliated with performances, as rooted in the experiments of the 1970s. La Ribot, now a resident of Geneva, hails from Madrid: in her own extravagant fashion, she links up with the codes of that practice. On the other hand, Anna Van Bree takes a more textual approach to the stage. The resulting creations represent a genre in their own right, what we could term theatre "beyond the walls." As such, they are distinguished by their manner of abolishing the ancestral boundary line, that transparent wall, the famous "fourth wall" at the heart of the realist aesthetic. That movement, born at the end of the nineteenth century thanks to the French actor and theatre director André Antoine, gained full recognition with the Russian Konstantin Stanislavsky, a father of art theatre. This beyond-the-walls theatre follows various pathways: in the two examples above, the artists borrow not only the venues favoured by the visual arts – namely exhibition halls and art centres – but also that realm's ambulatory dynamics. As spectators, we are invited to play along.

Theatre-lovers encounter a whole new approach, expected not only to witness the performance, to see it at somewhat of a remove and, as connoisseurs, to enjoy the prowess being staged but, as well, to become agents of the action. They are invited to organize its freedom, encouraged to forage on its behalf, to formulate the keys to its interpretation and, ever returning back and forth, to discover the innately open-ended sense of it all. Theatre is no longer expected to feign a High Mass. Instead, it seems meant to trigger individual crossroads. Is it mere happenstance, one wonders, that these sorts of offers are multiplying in an era imbued with ever more powerful and hypnotizing screens? Some artists are banking on centrifugal aesthetic canons: they suggest that the centripetal organization of space and of the world is but fiction. Such artists remind us that what we gaze out at is a choice, that a theatre piece is first and foremost a territory: geographic, sensitive, aesthetic.

Exposing the viewer

Theatre beyond-the-walls stands out for the attention it grants the spectators who, just as much as the performers, are considered as objects of study or, at the least, of observation. Take, for instance, the borderline (in every sense of the word) show *Libido Sciendi,* by the French stage director Pascal Rambert. At a dance programme venue (formerly an Ursuline convent) in June 2008, the audience of the Montpellier Danse festival watched a highly erotically-charged dance piece. Around midnight, the dancers Ikue Nakagawa and Lorenzo de Angelis disrobed. The two were in their twenties, beautiful and moving. They neared each other in silence, before she grasped his penis and the two embraced. They separated for a few seconds; then he began chasing her, grasping her, pretending to possess her. For forty-five minutes, the two exhausted

the countless gestures of desire. Keeping their faces blank, they gestured with an anatomical precision akin to rehearsing a mock *Kama Sutra,* as if challenged to never actually carry out the act. Every move incited fascination, in an enactment akin to a demonstration of utmost mastery.

Yet it was in 2010 in Geneva, at the Grü theatre once again, that *Libido Sciendi* made an even stronger impact. Pascal Rambert changed things around, replacing the frontal, classical setup used in Montpellier with a sports hall where everyone could position themselves freely, either seated on the floor or leaning against a pillar. Ikue Nakagawa and Lorenzo Angelis, a real-life couple, re-enacted their ceremonial dance, using the same gestures as in Montpellier, the same impatiently insistent silence, the same panting. Yet what stood out here was above and beyond any combination of mind and instinct, of cool head and warm body, being emitted from the stage. Instead, the audience found itself transformed into a troubled community of Peeping Toms among peers. They could observe themselves relishing the two "erotomaniacs" on stage who had sworn not to fulfil the act. Stealing glimpses at each other, viewers saw a reflection of their own turmoil, or lack thereof. In other words, they were left to discover who they were once the theatre is divested of all its guardrails: the duality of stage and seats, the fiction, the costumes.

For that is indeed the effect of such measures: they overexpose the viewers. The sum of individuals that we are ends up being a show in itself, an ethnological and political fable. In September 2014, La Ribot, together with the actor-performers Juan Loriente and Juan Dominguez, caused a scandal at the La Bâtie Festival with a piece entitled *The Triumph of Liberty (Le Triomphe de la liberté).* The programme announced their presence onstage at the Comédie de Genève theatre. Instead of the three artists, however, viewers encountered three longitudinally set up teleprompters staged and spaced so as to monopolize the audience's attention. Theatre stripped down to the starkness of a ghostly cathedral comes to mind: its arches, its scaffolding rods and pulleys, all suggesting an ancient ritual.

Liberty for the audience

What does this piece in fact present? Sitting in one's seat, one silently reads the text moving in white letters across the screens. The topic seems to be a young Spanish wedded couple who have won a honeymoon trip to Cuba. Once on the island, they spend a memorable evening in a cabaret, watching a black heavyweight crack nuts with his phallus. Half a century later, the same couple returns to the same cabaret, only to find that the performer can no longer carry out the aforesaid feat because – his eyesight has dimmed. It is a silly tall tale, yet intertwined with considerations on boredom and happiness, taken from philosophical writings. La Ribot and her companions make a prank of our everyday routines, mocking traditional couples, tourists on the lookout for the exotic, and – those who sit in the audience.

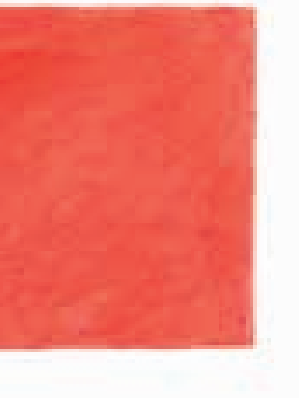
Why does such a stratagem scandalize people? Why do so many viewers feel swindled, as we learn from a subsequent article in the local newspaper *Le Temps?* Alya Stürenburg, who directs the La Bâtie Festival, attributes such reactions to what she terms a communication problem: "Until the day before the opening, the artists thought they'd be going on stage. That's what was explained in the programme and promised again in the on-site description sheets. The audience came expecting to see the performers, and the irritation some felt came from their frustration." That could be so. But delving more deeply into the matter, this anti-show troubled people because it referred the audience back to itself, inspiring scores of rarely formulated questions: What is it that I expect from a performance? What is the significance of the community we form within a theatre? What is the price of what I see (a question La Ribot had already implied in her *Piezas Distinguidas)?* Can I get up and leave the show before the ending? Am I capable of revolt?

On opening night, most of the witnesses remained until the end. And many of them asked themselves, even after the teleprompters were switched off, whether the show was actually over. In an interview in *Le Temps,* La Ribot offered the following as a key to the meaning: "What if the liberty were not at our end – the liberty taken – but at the viewers' end? The liberty we gave them, that of seeing what they wanted to see? One day before opening night, we realized that our stage presence would be a filter between the public and our message: a deliberately misleading message that bespeaks the eternal repetition of all things. When what in fact brings the show alive is each viewer's body. And the text: its presence as it unreels, its rhythm."

The Triumph of Liberty is an extreme example of beyond-the-walls theatre. A form obliges the spectator to move, be it mentally. To take a stand. To reconsider what is desired of fiction. Above all, the viewers themselves become the subject of a story to be drawn up, each one's own story, how each one relates to the event. In 2007, the Association for Contemporary Dance in Geneva welcomed Histoire(s) by the choreographer Olga de Soto. The stage was bare of any performer, but a film was screened showing handsome leathery faces one after the other. These narrate the opening night of *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort* ("The Young Man and Death"), Roland Petit's legendary dance piece presented on 25 June 1946, at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées in Paris. Nearly sixty years after its creation, the artist had managed to find a scattering of witnesses to the event. Each of them relates what he or she remembers of that theatre night. Their scraps of emotion turn this documentary play into a symbol: in this branch of theatre, it is the viewer who gets to play the leading role.

Alexandre Demidoff has been a culture journalist and a theatre and dance critic since 1994, writing for the *Nouveau Quotidien,* the *Journal de Genève* and the *Gazette de Lausanne,* and (since it was launched in 1998) for *Le Temps,* where he was also the head of the culture and society section from 2008 to 2015.

Translated from the French by Margie Mounier



The Feeling of Flying

Thanks to the development of cutting-edge equipment, virtual reality technology is reaching new levels of sophistication, and changing the way entertainment is made and consumed. At the 2015 Sundance Festival, the Zurich University of the Arts's *Birdly* project flew high above the competition.

By John Gaudiosi

A virtual reality (VR) flight simulator hand-built by a pair of professors and a graduate student from the Institute for Design Research at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) stole the spotlight from A-List celebrities like Keanu Reeves, Kevin Bacon and Ryan Reynolds at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. *Birdly* literally took center stage at the New Frontier showcase, as attendees waited for over two hours to experience what it is like to be a bird flying through San Francisco – at least for five minutes. The large ride, which requires users to lie prone and use their arms as wings to navigate between skyscrapers, was the centrepiece of the top floor display of VR projects. It is also at the centre of a new form of immersive entertainment.

Birdly's origins actually predate the Oculus Rift head-mounted display (HMD) it uses, but it is hard to imagine the immersion working without it. What makes this flight simulator soar is the complete feeling of vertigo that you experience as you look down at the streets far, far below. Turn to your left or right and you will see wings, which are controlled aerodynamically by your arms. The controls are intuitive, allowing you to lose yourself almost immediately in this virtual world. A fan mounted just in front of your face further adds to the realism, as the wind strength changes based on your own speed in the simulator. When you dive toward the city streets, the wind from the fan will rush against your face; within the game the audio will change to further enhance the sense of flight.

Being a bird

Max Rheiner, the lead architect behind *Birdly,* said the goal of this project was to explore the human computer interface through a full body immersion experience in a virtual reality space. Just as the Oculus Rift HMD is only a couple of years old, this exploration of complete immersion is also new. Rheiner said many of the early VR games, short films and experiences focus on the visuals and the audio. But the idea of full body immersion is largely untapped territory.

"I wanted to make a simulator where you are an embodiment of a bird," Rheiner explained. "You're not controlling or riding a bird, you are the bird. We tried to transform your human body into a bird's body so you get the sensations and experience of a bird. This was the artistic approach, but for me the steps in between were quite interesting, because we had to experiment with what really works in terms of how you can evoke the feeling of flying, how you can replicate the sense of speed, and all these different little facets that make the whole immersion successful. If one little piece breaks in this story, the immersion falls apart and it's not going to be realistic."

Rheiner and some of his students experienced different types of "flying" in their quest to replicate the freedom a bird has as it glides through the air, completely in control of its journey. They tried skydiving inside a huge wind tunnel, but that left them with sore backs. One student learned to pilot a helicopter, but he spent all of his time in the air focusing on not crashing the machine. Even an airplane had pilots concentrating on checklists and gauges rather than enjoying the flight. All of these real-world experiments led the team back to the subconscious mind and dreams.

"We studied dreams and found that most people have dreamed about flying, and about half of them have very satisfying memories of those dreams," Rheiner said. "They didn't need to train. They'd simply start out in the air and explore. They were perfect birds. And that's exactly what we tried to catch with this simulator. We could have made the controls much more elaborate, but we wanted to make it intuitive so that people really get it within thirty seconds. Once they get into the flow state they're just gliding, looking around and doing stuff as if they're birds."

Riding the VR wave

Shari Frilot, the curator of the New Frontier exhibition at Sundance, said *Birdly* is a fantastic example of how virtual reality can connect humans with their evolutionary dreams of flight. Although it may not seem like it at first, the simulator is telling a story. "You're flying over San Francisco and you have infinite choices of how you want to fly, how high you soar, if you want to dive through the canyons, you can even crash and burn," says Frilot. "This is all the language of gaming, but at the same time it's telling us a story of something that's very ancient within ourselves. It's very transformative to experience *Birdly.*"

Last year Frilot flew to San Francisco, where one of the three *Birdly* simulators is located, for a test flight before deciding to include the simulator at Sundance. The tech world first met *Birdly* last August at Swissnex in San Francisco, where it received rave reviews before heading north to Vancouver for the annual SIGGRAPH technology show. At Sundance, the competition was not just from celebrities. Frilot assembled a collection of a dozen VR experiences, many running with Oculus Rift devices, although the Samsung Galaxy VR mobile device and Google Cardboard fold-out mobile VR set-up were also on display.

The Oculus Rift debuted in an early prototype form back in 2012 as part of a New Frontier project by Nonny de la Peña called

Hunger in Los Angeles. Palmer Luckey, founder of Oculus VR and the Rift's inventor, was then a twenty-year-old intern working with her on the project. De la Peña, a senior research fellow at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California, recalls a late night in which Luckey's attention and a lot of electrical tape were required to keep the prototype together before the demo went live. Just four months after that Sundance debut, Kickstarter ignited a VR tidal wave that resulted in Facebook acquiring Oculus VR for 2 billion US dollars in 2014.

> "The controls are intuitive, allowing you to lose yourself almost immediately in this virtual world."

A future for filmmakers

Now independent filmmakers, as well as Hollywood studios like Fox Searchlight and Legendary Pictures, are exploring VR as a new form of storytelling. Even Oculus has entered the movie business. Oculus Story Studio launched at Sundance with former Pixar creatives heading the team. The sole focus for this studio is to tell short stories through VR using the latest technology and effects, while creating memorable characters. *Lost*, the first of four VR shorts from the studio, debuted at Sundance. It follows a mechanical hand's journey to connect with the robot that lost it.

Edward Saatchi, producer at Oculus Story Studio, believes the experimentation on display in VR films at Sundance New Frontier feels like the beginnings of a community that could have the same kind of impact on the world as the pioneers who helped set a grammar for film. He added that the range of uses of VR – for empathy, for documentary, found footage, storytelling, activism, fantasy and exploration – is really exciting.

The joke at Oculus VR headquarters is that the technology is like religion on contact because once you experience Oculus Rift, or the newer high definition Crescent Bay VR technology, you want to own a head-mounted device. Oculus sells developer kits that anyone can purchase, but the company is taking its time before launching the consumer version to make sure it gets everything right. Just as Rheiner and his team perfected *Birdly* before letting it fly, the first consumer Oculus HMD needs to be problem-free.

Sharing the dream

"We've had a number of the very best directors out there come visit us, get a demo, take off the HMD and say, 'Let's make a movie,'" says Brendan Iribe, CEO of Oculus VR. "It's hard to not want to get involved in VR once you experience it. We're trying to go out there and experiment and built a lot of these CG-animated films ourselves – with Oculus Story Studio – to see what it really takes to make a comfortable and compelling VR experience on the film side. As soon as we get to a good place, we're going to share that and go out and start evangelizing how these great creative directors could go out and make amazing VR films."

To name just one example, game developer Navid Khonsari is blending his background in gaming – from Rockstar Games titles like *Grand Theft Auto* and *Max Payne* – with filmmaking techniques and storytelling for the project *1979: Revolution*. The episodic Oculus Rift experience puts players on the streets of Iran during the revolution. "This is the pinnacle of storytelling," Khonsari said. "It's also a great time for the player, or the audience, because they feel like they are very much in control of their own destiny in terms of experiencing the story and looking around and truly exploring that world."

Meanwhile, the creators of *Birdly* are currently exploring ways to expand the flight simulator's reach. They have formed a startup that hopes to bring a manufactured version of the simulator to entertainment centers, arcades and possibly theme parks in the near future. Everyone has dreamed of flying, but this virtual simulation has made the dream a reality.

John Gaudiosi has been covering the world of video games for twenty-five years for print, online, video and television. He is a co-founder of Gamerhub Content Network syndication and editorial director of shacknews.com. He lives in North Carolina.

The Battle Against Limits

A brief history of art, seen as the history of transgressions against the moral order of the day.

By Laurent Wolf

In 2012, the Russian artist Piotr Pavlensky (b. 1984) sewed his lips together in front of a St. Petersburg cathedral, to protest against the condemnation of several members of the Pussy Riot punk group. And in 2014, perched atop a psychiatric hospital roof and in the nude like he was for his past protest actions, he cut off one of his earlobes to draw attention to the political intentions behind internments. Not that Piotr Pavlensky is insane: he claims to be inured to pain. Thanks to the internet, his politico-artistic performances have been seen worldwide. All seem rooted in inextricable situations with which one particularly determined individual decides to wrestle. The history of art embraces precedents for such confrontations, which Pavlensky himself holds up as references.

In Arles, on the morning of 23 December 1888 – after a tumultuous evening that included a quarrel with Paul Gauguin – Vincent van Gogh woke up to find his left ear cut off. Several hypotheses exist as to both the circumstances and the author of that mutilation, but conventional wisdom – and the source of the van Gogh myth – is that the artist himself inflicted the injury. His *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* of 1889 forever instills the model of a genius victim of his own torture and that of society: someone destined to suffer in the name of his total commitment to artistic creation.

That date in December 1888 represents a watershed event in the history of art, leaving the world with the afterimage of an individual having surrendered to himself and to his own experience of the world, bereft of any other recourse than the art to which he sacrifices his persona. Necessarily in conflict with the standing order and rules, art is called upon to define its own rules, its own finality.

Against the moral order

In the West, for a long time, the definition of art held its own beyond the individual will of any artists. These had to comply with the iconographic programmes set up by the Church, and with the requirements of their backers. Nonetheless, nothing kept them from enabling their art to evolve within the rules others had set up for them. To disobey those rules meant accepting the consequences, as in the case of Rembrandt and Caravaggio. On the other hand, forbidden acts or sufferings could be painted in the name of edification. This inspired terrifying scenes of torture against the holy martyrs, or various series of punishments meted out to sinners at the Last Judgment: *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503–1504) by Hieronymus Bosch comes to mind, namely the figure with an object thrust up his anus.

Such precise imagery rules held sway until the end of the eighteenth century. The early nineteenth century saw artists begin to introduce their own experience. Roles started to shift, with the artists taking over the commands. For over a century, until World War I, this reversal induced an endless battle between on the one hand academic principles, contemporaneous tastes and morals and, on the other, the goals that the artists themselves dared set up. More or less accepted at the time, the moral order of the day turned into a contentious situation of ever-shifting limits to be either respected or transgressed, and this in the face of that order's inertia.

The Art of Provocation

From the 1920s onwards, the twentieth century is reputed to be the century of artistic provocations – by first the Dadaists, and then the Surrealists. Indeed, during the 1960s, provocations in general seemed to have become the order of the day. The underlying idea implies the existence of conflict, but as seen from the point of view of a given order: it fails to take into account the titanic job challenging artists since the end of the nineteenth century – that is, the injunction for them to say and make what is art.

Several artists even endangered their very bodies in their search for an answer. In 1969, forty-five years prior to Piotr Pavlenski's actions, Michel Journiac created his *Mass for a Body* performance, inviting the audience to eat pieces of blood sausage made out of his own blood. In 1971 Gina Pane climbed a ladder with rungs made of sharp-edged blades for her *Non-Anesthetized Climb*. The battle against limits – that is, how these are to be defined – represents an exception of less than two centuries within the millenary history of art. It is a fierce battle, and far from over.

Laurent Wolf holds a PhD in sociology, with a focus on industrial design. He is a journalist and art critic, and writes for the daily newspaper *Le Temps* (Switzerland) and the journal *Etudes* (France).

Translated from the French by Margie Mounier

Borders? Which Borders?

The cultural exchange programme *Viavai – Contrabbando culturale Svizzera-Lombardia* is drawing to a close. A look back at 2 years of work, 150 events, and many border crossings.

Every cultural exchange programme necessarily and by definition also tackles the question of borders. In the cautious, obstacle-ridden and sometimes victorious search for understanding there is always a "here and there," an "I and the others," text and context, give and take. *Viavai – Contrabbando culturale Svizzera-Lombardia,* with its cross-border "cultural contraband," was certainly not exempt from this general principle of exchange. The project focused on a border – as it has been drawn on a map, and as it has been bolstered by the political, economic and social differences that run through the history of Swiss-Italian co-operation and confrontation. But it is also a border that is constantly being trespassed, because people, ideas and shared goods are still able to transcend it, thanks to their proximity and regardless of the divisions drawn.

After two years of intensive preparation and the launch of the first project phase in September 2014, *Viavai* is now approaching its final destination. The 18 projects selected for the programme have borne abundant fruit: around 150 events have taken place in Switzerland and in Italy's Lombardy region. The project *ArTransit,* for instance, literally criss-crossed the border thanks to the engine of the regional train that served as a mobile performance platform. The project dissoved both geographic and artistic boundaries: moving between the two urban poles of Zurich and Milan, it featured various media and languages, as well as echoes of idyllic mountain landscapes and the bustle of the cities.

The project *Vedi alla Voce,* from the École Cantonale de l'Art du Valais (ECAV), focused on the border as the site of migration and as a bridge for lived experiences. Basing their work on archival research, the participating visual artists succeeded at bringing the discourse of border-crossings and their significance into the present time. *Arte Riprogrammata,* a workshop from the Scuola universitaria professionale della Svizzera italiana (SUPSI), allowed visitors to manipulate the mechanisms of works by the Gruppo T, thus deliberately disregarding the classic museum dictum of "do not touch the art works."

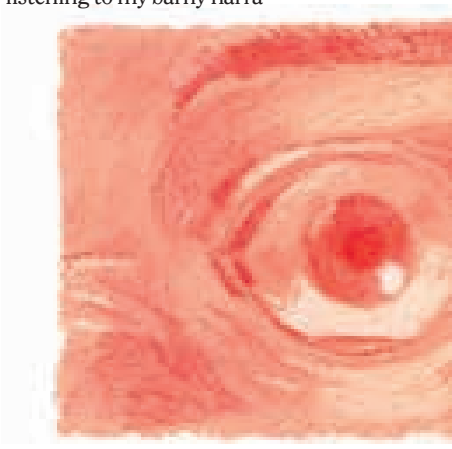
The energies set in motion by *Viavai* will continue to pose a collective challenge, beyond the temporal limits of the programme itself. The continuation and maintenance of the networks built up over the preceding months are now the responsibility of the partner organizations and cultural institutions. While looking forward to the closing celebration in the fall of 2015, *Viavai* now segues into the great spectacle of Expo 2015, which has pride of place in Milan during the summer months. One lasting result of the programme is the publication *Gli immediati dintorni,* a literary guide to the regions of Ticino and Lombardy that recalls the cross-border TILO train route. Published jointly (in Italian only) by Casagrande editions and the online journal *doppiozero,* it is an ideal text to remind us of which borders we continually traverse.

For more information: www.viavai-cultura.net

Translation: Impossible?

On navigating the borders between languages and the purported impossibility of translating Swiss-German dialects.

By Pedro Lenz



When I'm out and about, I sometimes watch people reading. I notice that most of the time, the books they are reading are translations. The people around me in the train, the café, the waiting room or the library are reading German translations of Swedish, North American, Brazilian, French, Russian, Italian, Japanese, British or Spanish books. I don't suppose that any of these readers have ever asked themselves whether it is actually possible to translate, say, Japanese or Russian into German. But if I tell someone that my novel *Der Goalie bin ig* has been translated into French or Italian, the reactions are almost always the same. Almost everyone confronts me with the same incredulous or even scolding questions: "What? Your novel has been translated? But it's written in Swiss-German dialect! That's impossible to translate! How are you going to translate Swiss-German? No way. All the subtleties, all those nuances, the rich vocabulary of our dialect – none of that can be translated!"

My German-speaking compatriots who tend to make such comments seem to believe that Swiss-German vernacular is the only untranslateable language in the world. They hold the near-unshakeable conviction that our dialects are part of the concept, cherished in these parts, of the "Swiss special case." What's interesting is that this quasi-religious veneration of our everyday speech is also found among cultivated, well-traveled and worldly Swiss citizens. At the same time, I also often encounter the opposite phenomenon. When Swiss-German dialect is not being idealized, it is being trivialized. As in the oft-heard question: "How can you write literature in a language that doesn't even have a future tense?" These people, too, are also convinced that our dialect is untranslateable, but they are swayed by different prejudices. In their opinion, a language that is so utterly unliterary cannot possibly produce literature in translation either.

Cultural differences

In the French- or Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland, the reactions are quite different. People at readings tend to refer directly to the translated text, without lingering over the question of the translatability of Swiss-German dialects. Instead, the discussions tend to focus on how to render the spoken character of the original in the target language. In both the French and the Italian linguistic regions, the questions asked at the readings were often about details. In the Italian version, for instance, the term *Kafi fertig* (coffee with schnapps) was preserved in the original German and explained via a footnote. In the French version, on the other hand, the translators Daniel Rothenbühler and Nathalie Kehrli opted for the more local-sounding *café Pomme* (coffee with apple brandy). The audiences at such readings sometimes get into discussions on how far the translator's freedom should go, and whether it makes more sense to adapt the names of people and places, or to keep them in the original. I myself leave such decisions to the translators. The only thing I care about is whether or not the text flows just as naturally in the target language.

However, not every language is equally suited to rendering the spoken character of the original text. In the French-speaking parts of Switzerland in particular, I noticed that the speakers tended to summon up a particular – and this case misplaced – gravity when reading from the book. It often seemed to me that the actor who had been chosen to read the French text aloud was trying to make it sound more dignified through the use of pathos. Although the translators had succeed in their efforts to render the spoken, natural-sounding flow of the language, the speakers seemed to be attempting to turn it into high art. I had the impression that I was no longer listening to my barfly narrator, but to a finicky intellectual trying to convince the audience that the book was truly literature, and not merely pub talk.

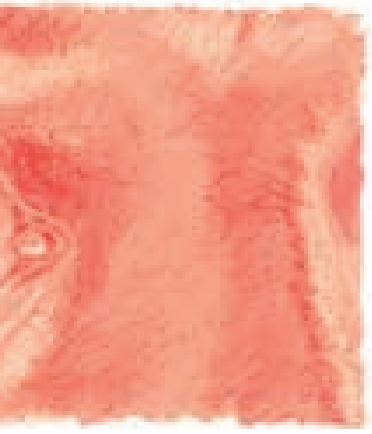
Of the six languages into which the novel has been translated thus far (Italian, Standard German, Glaswegian English, Lithuanian, French and Hungarian), the French version was probably the greatest challenge, most likely because French is a highly normative language. Apparently there are not many literary precursors who have dared to deviate from the norm. My attempts to incorporate linguistic "impurities" – like anglicisms, made-up sayings, unusual metaphors or hybrid forms – in the most natural way possible, seem to contradict the francophone understanding of literature. At any rate, this is the explanation I came up with for the apologetic behaviour of the gentleman who read aloud from my book at the Morges municipal library. The man, apparently a regular participant in the town's literary events, interrupted his reading at several points in order to assure the audience that what he had just read was really the exact wording, as found in the book.

When it came to the Italian version, the translator Simona Sala and I discussed whether it would make sense to render the novel in a Swiss-Italian dialect. We decided against it. Sala felt that the characters described in the book would be unlikely to speak the local patois. Since the story takes place in an urban setting in the late

twentieth century, it would be inauthentic to have them speak a rural dialect. My own experiences corresponded with this view, and so I agreed with her choice. One amusing mistake I recall from the first version of the Italian translation had to do with the Swiss-German expression *"a d Kasse cho."* When we say in Swiss-German

> The man interrupted his reading at several points in order to assure the audience that what he had just read was really the exact wording, as found in the book.

dialect that someone has "come up to the cash (desk)," we mean the person will have to pay a price, either literally or figuratively. The translator, however, did not know this expression and interpreted it to mean the opposite. She made the far more logical assumption that someone who "comes to the cash" has come into money. We quickly cleared up the misunderstanding. But it stayed with me as a tangible example of cultural differences.



For the English version of the novel we found a different solution. The English used in the translation is not the standard language, but is based on the vernacular forms spoken in Glasgow, Scotland. This choice made sense, because my characters, had they lived in Glasgow, would have spoken this version of the English language. In addition, it was truly a translation from one dialect into another, because Scottish literature often uses such idiomatic elements. The Scottish translator Donal McLaughlin struck just the right tone, as the reaction of an audience member at a book launch in Glasgow later proved. After the reading, this man asked me how I, as a Swiss, had written a story about people from his town. I tried to explain that this was a misunderstanding: the inspiration for my characters had been my home town in Switzerland. But the man didn't believe it, and insisted that he knew the characters I had described in the novel; they were all Glasgow types. He could not have given the translator a better compliment.

Translating for the sound

In the case of the standard German version I asked the translator Raphael Urweider to use the most neutral language possible, eschewing typically Swiss idioms or other regional elements. Thus, we deliberately chose not to translate the book into, say, Vienna or Berlin dialect, because the translation from Swiss dialect to standard language was intended to make the book accessible to all German-language readers. For this reason, Urweider put the emphasis on the tone rather than the words. He made me read each chapter aloud, first in the original and then in the standard German translation. While I read, he made adjustments to the translation, in order to render the melody of the language as precisely as possible. As a result, I am now able to do readings in Germany or Austria in the same way I'm used to doing them in the original version.

While I'm more or less familiar with the four languages mentioned thus far, I don't speak a word of Lithuanian or Hungarian. All I could offer the translators – Markus Roduner and Rimantas Kmita (Lithuanian), and Lajos Adamik (Hungarian) – were discussions about the narrator's attitude and the setting described in the book. At the readings in both of those countries, I tried to concentrate on the sound of the language, in order to see where it deviated from the original and where it didn't. I like to imagine that I was able, in this way, to learn something about the quality of the translations without any knowledge of either language.

In conclusion, I can say that the translations of my novel *Der Goalie bin ig* accomplished a number of things. For one thing, through my collaborations with the various translations, I got to know my own text in a new way. For another, I hope that the adaptations into different cultural and linguistic contexts have helped to dispell the prejudices mentioned earlier about the supposed impossibility of translating dialect-based literature. And finally, the whole experience has shown that the character "Goalie" and his story are not restricted to any one specific language or place.

Pedro Lenz (b. 1965 in Langenthal) is a writer and spoken-word performer based in Olten. His novel *Der Goalie bin ig* has been translated into English as *Naw Much of a Talker* and was published by Freight Books (Glasgow) in September 2013.

Translated from the German by Marcy Goldberg

Rock the Dropbox

In pop music, bands with a fixed line-up are on the way out. Today's successful musicians are more likely to be well-connected soloists.

By Christoph Fellmann

We can hardly say we weren't told. When Sam Smith received four Grammy awards in Los Angeles in February 2015, it merely confirmed what had already been predicted. Just over a year earlier, the 22-year-old soul singer from London had topped the list of most promising pop talents published by the BBC each December, which is eagerly awaited throughout the music industry. Some 200 critics, bloggers, producers and DJs are invited to vote. As well as Smith, stars such as Adele, Lady Gaga, Azealia Banks, Mika, Lana Del Rey and Ellie Goulding have all recently headed the ranking or come close. Clearly, then, the BBC's preview of the year is more than just a bit of fun for nerds.

What is striking about this list is not only the market power wielded by those names, but also the fact that they are solo artists. There have been exceptions: they include Hurts, an electropop duo that has built up a firm following on the circuit in recent years, and Haim, a girl band that is a solid performer on the club scene. But only twice in the last decade has a band headed the list, and the forecast for 2015 includes eleven solo artists, one duo and just three bands. Ten years ago, things were very different. In the BBC lists for 2003, 2004 and 2005, bands were still clearly in the majority. This is significant because the BBC's predictions carry some weight. They also tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies. The Ultimate Charts, a global hit parade drawn up by the California-based BigChampagne Media Measurement, shows a similar picture. Compiled from big data – it includes sales and downloads of songs and albums, but also streaming, clicks on YouTube and social media, radio airplay and concert tickets sold – it offers a pretty accurate picture of which stars are currently in vogue. On 19 February 2015, the top ten consisted of nine solo artists and one band, while the top 100 were made up of 83 solo artists, 3 duos and 14 bands.

Band of outsiders

But if the BBC and Ultimate Charts lists are a true indicator of what brings success in the pop market, that's far from good news for all the hopeful teenagers currently forming their own bands. The lesson is clear: the model that has shaped the subculture of rock music since the 1960s is in crisis. The format has been successful for decades; the band was a fantastic invention because it transformed being an outsider into a shared experience. At an age when gritty lyrics and clashing guitars signal a break with the old family ties, the band offers young people an escape from the drudgery of home life, but also a chance to share exciting new experiences. Vividly symbolized by the tour bus phenomenon, the band – usually a group of young men – rejects the bourgeois virtues of comfort, order and cleanliness, abandoning the fusty surroundings of the suburbs for the dust of the open road. Sooner or later, of course, they mature into adults, their musical tastes settle down and they begin to think about starting a family: a development that naturally causes the band to split up.

So the band concept may have stood the test of time, but perhaps it is just too romantic for our modern era – not least for financial reasons. Even well-known bands can no longer make a living recording and selling their music. These days, record sales, downloads and streaming are not enough to pay the bills. In a recent interview, the musicians who make up Grizzly Bear claimed to be doing just fine. The band from Brooklyn is revered by countless indie fans and fills large venues in the US, but only two of its four members can afford medical insurance. It's a similar picture in Switzerland: Züri West, one of the most successful local bands of the last thirty years, is only making enough to feed its singer/songwriter Kuno Lauener. The remaining band members have to top up their income in other ways, working as session musicians, producers or music teachers. So it's no wonder that rock music is downsizing, as if management consultants from McKinsey had beaten a path through the rehearsal rooms. In recent years the duo has been held up as the next big thing. The White Stripes, the Black Keys, the Ting Tings and Royal Blood make do with a guitar and a drum kit, nothing more. Rock isn't dead. It has just become efficient.

The one-person company

However, the new economic realities of the music business are not the only reason for the decline of the band. Equally important is the fact that rock today plays an entirely different societal role than just two decades ago, when Kurt Cobain's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" offered a sarcastic coda to twelve years of Reaganomics. Today, a rock singer is no longer necessarily an outsider forging links with other outsiders through a band. While pop, rock and punk once embodied an attitude to life, today they are studied in workshops. Making music has long been an established route to a successful career, taught at colleges of art and music. There, the mantra is not comradeship but competition. It is hardly a coincidence that the bulk of the pop talents proclaimed each year by the BBC studied at art schools. They are soloists with a diploma. That doesn't mean that they single-mindedly do their own thing to the exclusion of all else. Indeed, they operate within networks of artists and play in bands for a time. But what used to be a band biography is now mostly a long list of "projects," and it is not uncommon for a young musician to play in three, four, eight or even fifteen different line-ups.

This too, of course, is a reflection of economic pressure. Only a handful of privileged stars can live from one activity alone. Every

one of the musicians in Animal Collective, an acclaimed group from Baltimore, plays on albums by fellow musicians as well as in their regular band. All of them have a solo career on the go as well. A musician's life, then, revolves around a diversified one-person company and a social network consisting not just of musicians but also filmmakers, designers, graphic artists, sound engineers and advertisers. Their interactions can be either direct or digital. Noah Lennox, the drummer in Animal Collective, has lived for many years in Lisbon, where he also records solo albums under the name Panda Bear. But when he's working on an album with his band, the music files criss-cross the Atlantic – or are uploaded directly to Dropbox. It's a similar situation for the British singer M.I.A.: from her base in London, she works on sound files sent to her by partners all round the globe. Lady Gaga, meanwhile, is the central figure in an artists' collective that works in New York as House of Gaga, creating sets and costumes, dreaming up videos and scandals.

> "What used to be a band biography is now mostly a long list of 'projects,' and it is not uncommon for a young musician to play in three, four, eight or even fifteen different line-ups."

Extended careers

This is how things are done in the twenty-first century, both in the pop scene and elsewhere: in shifting collectives, with fluid boundaries between friendship and the professional division of labour. Collaboration instead of commitment; loose networks, not love stories. Some may feel regret when they compare this state of affairs with the Rolling Stones, still jamming together fifty years on, or AC/DC, long in the tooth but still going strong. But these bands don't soldier on simply because they have sworn lifelong brotherhood. They also continue to rake in the money. Forming a band may have been a successful model for decades, but few have made more than three or four good records and grown old gracefully. Ironically, the new methods have made it easier to extend careers in ways that are artistically interesting. Radiohead have maintained their breathtaking level partly because singer Thom Yorke has hung around with DJ friends in clubs while the band was taking time out, and guitarist Jonny Greenwood studied New Music and wrote soundtracks. Likewise, Blur's Damon Albarn had to break up his band, leave the UK and strike up new musical friendships around the world in order to become one of the most multifaceted pop stars of the present day (which is not to say that he should carry on composing operas).

So the band has even lost its core function as a medium for good old rock and roll. Today, its chief virtues are managed and showcased with consummate skill by soloists working in loose collectives: artists such as Jack White, who diversified his career and his neo-blues style in three bands – the White Stripes, Dead Weather and the Raconteurs – before setting up a vinyl label and striking out on his own. Or Matthew E. White, a musical virtuoso who bucked the crisis in his industry by not just setting up a record company but also building a studio and signing up a house band. Now Spacebomb Records in Richmond, Virginia, has created some of the most fabulous soul albums of our times, whether under its own name or that of Natalie Prass, whom White knew from back in his high school days. So pop music has lost none of its capacity to constantly re-invoke old myths and celebrate old sounds afresh. But its methods have changed, and now when pop speaks of the economic and social realities of our time it does so via the smooth retro sounds of Jack or Matthew E. White. And no one can say we didn't hear it coming.

Christoph Fellmann (b. 1970 in Lucerne) works as a journalist and copywriter in Lucerne and Zurich. He has been pop music editor of the *Tages-Anzeiger* newspaper since 2008.

Translated from the German by Geoffrey Spearing

The Art of Explaining Science

"Scientific entertainment" might seem like a contradiction in terms. But cross-disciplinary initiatives in Britain are bringing laboratory research and artistic creativity closer together, and helping to explain scientific concepts in popular terms.

By Roland Fischer

It's a late-January evening in London and the foyer of the Bloomsbury Theatre is abuzz. The final performance of the Festival of the Spoken Nerd starts in half an hour. Despite its name, it is not really a festival at all, but one of the most successful science shows in Britain right now. Moreover the Bloomsbury is not one of London's famous West-End stages but "merely" the house theatre of University College London (UCL). The auditorium, though, is far from small: it has room for over 500 people and it is sold out. The mood is relaxed, and there is much banter. A science presentation in London is not necessarily a quiet and exclusive event, and certainly not a solemn affair. Today's show is a "best of" scientific entertainment, bringing together three of the most eminent figures in the field. TV presenter Steve Mould, the only non-specialist on the team, takes the most mischievous approach to the subject. He plays the overconfident magician's apprentice, constantly constructing new experiments and only really coming into his own when things get out of hand. Helen Arney and Matt Parker, the other two hosts, are both scientists. While Helen uses songs and a ukulele to convey the complexities of physics, Matt is the mathematician baffled by the audience's failure to share his passion for formulae but always finding a quirky way to enthuse them. Both derive their humour chiefly from the ups and downs of their own expert experience – and that of the audience. While the seats are primarily filled by academics, the audience make-up is remarkably diverse. Every age group is represented, from giggly freshers to hoary computer science professors.

Fruitful exchange

This is "public engagement," an initiative to popularize science that is well established in the UK. At UCL, the man in charge is Steve Cross. The scientist and comedian heads a small office separate from the much larger public relations department, organizing events that aim to bridge the gap between science and art. Marketing the university and explaining its research to the widest possible audience is one thing; establishing common ground between laypeople and experts, finding ways to enable fruitful exchange between them and bring science to the public at a level they can understand is a challenge of a very different order. This has been widely understood in Britain. As a result, the last ten years have seen the creation of state-sponsored public engagement initiatives followed by new formats designed to make experiencing and exploring science fun. They also make full use of artistic creativity.

Steve Cross has launched a variety of show formats in which scientists present their research in an easily accessible way, while seeking to entertain a public spoilt for choice when it comes to comedy. Some of these formats received their baptism of fire at the Bloomsbury. Others, such as the Science Showoff, a kind of anarchic science slam, Cross designed from the outset with venues far from the university campus in mind. They tour pub basements and small theatres the length and breadth of Britain. Importantly, the researchers are not simply thrown into the unfamiliar surroundings of the stage, but are schooled by theatre professionals. The scientists gratefully take on board their advice about entertainment. Traditionally, British audiences have a more positive attitude toward the "popularization" of knowledge than their counterparts on the Continent. Here, the term is shorn of any negative connotations.

Inspiring and entertaining

Guerilla Science takes a slightly more irreverent approach to its subject. As their name suggests, this group of young scientists and artists engages in an unconventional form of warfare. They employ theatrical installations to explore how a lay audience responds to – often edgy – topics such as animal experiments and the physiology of the female labia, in as relaxed a context as possible. Recently they taught their audience about laboratory rats, with experimental scientists dressed in rat costumes putting them through their paces in a labyrinthine test environment. The most popular venues for "guerilla" training camps are open air festivals such as Glastonbury, where one might assume people go to hear music. Jen Wong, one of the leaders of Guerilla Science, sets me right: "The festival atmosphere is perfect for our shows. Visitors leave behind their everyday lives and are prepared to experience science in a different way. As long as they are inspired and entertained, they're not bothered about the genre."

The majority of these interdisciplinary initiatives come from scientists themselves and flourish not only thanks to state support via public engagement but also, crucially, to the fertile ground offered by the Wellcome Trust. The world's third-largest charitable foundation is not just the most important provider of funding for medical research in the UK (far larger than the public purse), but also has a well-financed department that promotes art projects, especially those dealing with medical topics. Looking back, Ariane Koek, who created the successful Arts@CERN programme in Switzerland and previously conducted field work in London, describes the Wellcome Trust's commitment as a "game changer" for inter-

disciplinary projects. The Trust has been backing new ways of bringing science and art together for more than twenty years. Its development is an interesting story. Ken Arnold, Head of Public Programmes at the Wellcome Collection, the Foundation's museum, explains: "Initially, the projects were very much focused on communicating scientific content. But over time the artistic standpoints became much more emancipated." The Wellcome Trust now also promotes art projects without asking if they are of direct benefit to science, leading to greater freedom and, ultimately, more exciting results. The museum, which investigates medical topics from an unconventional perspective and also holds an extensive collection of exhibits by contemporary artists, is among the most interesting and successful in London. The spring exhibition on the history of sexology, which adopts a strongly narrative approach to the subject and considers the cultural history as well as the medicine behind it, is crowded even on a normal weekday.

The UK is also home to one of the most important pioneers promoting the fusion of art and science: The Arts Catalyst. The clue is in the name. The organization, which celebrated its twentieth birthday last year, has become famous in Britain and beyond, working with leading art museums as well as numerous universities. It promotes art that, in the words of its mission statement, "experimentally and critically engages with science."

In Britain, the key players have learnt over the last two decades that both art and science can benefit from inspired yet critical engagement. In Switzerland, scientists have yet to accustom themselves to meeting artists on equal footing; in the UK, researchers rarely dismiss the idea. On the contrary, they approach the challenges of art with avid curiosity. Daphna Attias of the theatre group Dante Or Die, for example, investigated how a detailed list of the medicines we consume throughout our lives can be read as a hidden biography. During her research, she encountered great openness on the part of scientists, leading her to comment: "When we are obsessed with something, the languages we speak aren't actually that different."

On the day after my visit to the Bloomsbury, newspapers report that Tom Stoppard, one of the best-known contemporary British dramatists, has tackled a scientific topic in his latest play: *The Hard Problem* deals with the question of how our consciousness arises at the neurophysiological level. The sold-out performances at the National Theatre are the ultimate accolade, demonstrating that today's relevant issues start out in the research lab. Getting them out of the lab and closer to the people is, however, still a task for the arts.

Roland Fischer is a science journalist and culture blogger who regularly navigates between disciplines. He is the organizer of the Mad Scientist Festival in Bern and sometimes appears on stage himself, educating audiences about all things scientific with the help of actors and musicians.

Translated from the German by Geoffrey Spearing

Creative Collisions Between Art and Science

As the birthplace of the World Wide Web, CERN remains a key source of digital innovation. Pro Helvetia and the Arts@CERN programme offer residencies for artists, allowing them to spend time at the research centre in order to develop interactive creative projects.

CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, is not only the global centre for particle physics research and the home of the legendary Large Hadron Collider. It is also the cradle of the internet revolution. It was there that, in the 1980s, Tim Berners-Lee and Robert Cailliau created the structures for the first World Wide Web. Since it was made available to the general public in 1993, the web has transformed our everyday lives. Artistic and cultural goods are now accessible in digital form, at the click of a button – a development that has spurred many artists to rethink their working practices. The internet has also provided new possibilities for creating innovative interactive art.

In order to encourage this type of exploration, the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia and the Arts@CERN programm have issued a series of calls for projects. Swiss artists from all disciplines are invited to apply to spend time at the CERN laboratories and meet its researchers, with the goal of developing interactive web-based works.

Joint winners of the initiative Accelerate@CERN were game designers Nadezda Suvorova and Mario von Rickenbach, who were thus able to spend one month at the CERN Data Centre. Both artists had already distinguished themselves on the international independent video game scene: Suvorova's *Mikma* and von Rickenbach's *Krautscape* were presented to great acclaim at the Game Developers Conference in San Francisco. In the course of a residency in November 2014, the duo collected a torrent of information and ideas from CERN physicists and computer scientists, for use in future projects.

A further initiative, entitled Collide@CERN, consists of a three-month residency programme. It was launched by Arts@CERN in 2012 and has already hosted important artists such as Julius von Bismarck, Ryoji Ikeda and Gilles Jobin. Under the name Collide@CERN–Pro Helvetia (reflecting the collaboration with the Arts Council), the new call for projects will provide the winner with a residency in late 2015.

For the blog by Nadezda Suvorova and Mario von Rickenbach documenting their stay at CERN: playatcern.tumblr.com

For further information: arts.web.cern.ch and www.prohelvetia.ch/mobile

Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council, maintains a global network of branch offices which serve cultural exchange with Switzerland and support worldwide cultural contact.

Of Time and the River

NEW DELHI

At the second edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, three Swiss artists offered unique perspectives on time and space, geography and astronomy.

By Rosalyn D'Mello, New Delhi – It is the beginning of the twenty-first century. A nuclear war has rendered the Earth inhospitable to vegetation. Anticipating a time when the atmosphere will become harmless for plants once again, different species are placed in gigantic hemispheric greenhouses carried by spacecraft. From the vantage point of the United States in 1972, such a far-sighted premise was not that far-fetched. This synopsis was the plot of Douglas Trumbull's science fiction film *Silent Running,* a dystopian tale of one man's obsessive instinct to preserve the plant species in his care. This prophetic citation marks the beginning of a futuristic timeline retroactively foretold in the literature of the twentieth century. Swiss artist Marie Velardi is responsible for this chronological ordering of fictitious foretelling. Titled *Future Perfect, 21st Century,* her five-

Julian Charrière with the 13 globes from his Biennale piece *We Are All Astronauts Aboard a Little Spaceship Called Earth*.

Photos: Menika van der Poorten

metre-long paper scroll spread across a lengthy rectangular table foretells events, mentioned in twentieth-century science fiction books and films, that are set between 2001 and 2099.

The memory of the future

On display at the second edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Velardi's cartography of the imagined future punctuates the overarching theme, "Whorled Explorations," chosen by artistic director Jitish Kallat, while espousing itself as a "guidebook for the time traveler." The documented scenarios range from complete civilizational collapse and migration to Mars, to a world where everyone speaks Portuguese. At Fort Kochi – bordered as it is by the waters of the Periyar, speckled with Chinese fishing nets and a syncretic architectural landscape that bears evidence to its colonized past under the Dutch, Portuguese, and British – Velardi's timeline could seem out of place, given its primarily Western pool of references that attests to the future-colonial, an extension of the postcolonial. However, like the fictional world upon which it is predicated, Velardi's *Future Perfect* gains its imaginative valence from the twin forces of probability and plausibility. Velardi's *Future Perfect* is a meditation on how the future is perceived through the limited yet imaginative lens of the present.

Prevailing on her artistic mission of archiving prophecies to create what she calls "the memory of the future," Velardi, in another exhibit, assumes the role of the seer. A blue room resembling an open globe – each wall represents an ocean, with meridians plotted along its length – houses *Atlas of Lost Islands (2007)*. The work comprises ink drawings of inhabited sinking islands around the world; these capture the fragility of these submerged ecosystems and are arranged in a rough geographic order upon the walls. A bound volume, allegedly from the future, that contains all of these drawings sits on a plinth. Its cover announces the purported date of its release: 2107, by which time, Velardi has estimated, all of these indexed islands will have disappeared. Her work is rendered all the more poignant when placed within the landscape of Kochi – a city whose cartographic existence dates back to the year 1341, when it emerged to replace the historic port city of Muziris that had been flooded by the waters of the River Periyar.

Marie Velardi and her imagined timeline *Future Perfect, 21st Century*.

Earth at a standstill

Christian Waldvogel's contribution was also catalyzed by the site of the Biennale. It was based on his discovery that, for a person in Kochi, India's northernmost point lies 125 kilometres underneath the horizon, "a fall that is equal to fifteen times the height of India's tallest mountain." His site-specific installation, *Recently, the non-flat-earth paradigm,* is, according to him, a sculptural representation of this "rediscovery," depicting the part of the Earth's curved surface delineated by India's political border, as seen by a beholder situated in Kochi. The curved atmosphere is shown as an abstract but realistic layer of clouds.

The Earth Turns Without Me, Waldvogel's other installation at the Biennale, is a more complex work that traverses the boundaries between space and time: a chronicle of the artist's quest to briefly step away from the rotation of the Earth. Waldvogel's desire was to negate the Earth's eastward motion by flying himself westward in an aircraft at an equal speed. The aim was to achieve a stationary state with respect to the sun, and by converting the cockpit into a pinhole camera, to capture a four-minute static exposure of the sun, as proof that the Earth had indeed turned for a period without him. *Earthstill* and *Starstill,* the two lightbox images that had initially triggered this quest, were exhibited as part of the display. The former, shot with an ordinary camera, reveals the stars as streaks blurred by the Earth's motion, while the latter, captured using an astronomer's camera, is a clear image of the stars that cancels the Earth's motion. The elaborate installation was the consequence of an actual journey made by Waldvogel in a supersonic Swiss Air Force plane flying west at the Earth's rotational velocity (1158 km/hr in Switzerland). Apart from the lightbox images, the installation also featured the resulting video of the Earth's moving surface as the aircraft stood still next to it, a vitrine with detailed documentation of the process, and a positive of the exposed film revealing the sun's image not as a streak, but a concentrated point.

A still from Christian Waldvogel's filmic documentation of *The Earth Turns Without Me*.

Suspended worlds

Like the works of his Swiss contemporaries, Julian Charrière's exhibit, *We Are All Astronauts Aboard a Little Spaceship Called Earth*, was extremely popular among the Biennale's many visitors. It was displayed in an inner chamber of the restored Durbar Hall in Ernakulam, a ferry ride away from the main Fort Kochi site of the Biennale. Visitors arriving at the exhibit

found themselves suddenly carried away by its scale and the inherent poetry of its composition: comprised of thirteen found globes, all manufactured between 1890 and 2011, suspended between the ceiling and the surface of a dusty table. Except that the globes, representing the Earth, had been smoothened out with "international sandpaper" – made by the artist, using mineral samples from all the world's recognized nations that had been left over from his 2013 artwork *Monument – Sedimentation of Floating World*. Charrière's dream-like tableau seemed ethereal, with the scattered sandpapered remains forming a delicate and fragile textural surface across the expanse of the table. The now-erased spheres floated weightlessly, as if miraculously relieved of the burden of containing the myriad boundaries that constitute the human experience of the Earth. "My work deals with the concept of space almost as an archaeological production, which handles the question of culture rather than specific political geographies," Charrière said. "Showing *We Are All Astronauts* within the Indian context enables new readings, which constitute culturally-bound interpretations. It is not the work that fits the space or vice versa, but the combination of both which co-produce new meanings."

Rosalyn D'Mello is a New Delhi-based independent writer and former Editor-in-Chief of *BLOUIN ARTINFO* India. Her forthcoming work of non-fiction, *A Handbook For My Lover,* is being published in India by Harper Collins.

Coming of Age

JOHANNESBURG

With his long-term project *21,* Swiss artist Mats Staub has been documenting other people's memories of coming of age for several years. He has now brought the project to South Africa, thanks to a research residency from Pro Helvetia Johannesburg.

By *Bongani Kona* – Kent Lingeveldt exhales before he speaks into the microphone. "I turned twenty-one in 2000," he says. But it was a difficult time, marred by tragedy. From an early age he had been an avid skateboarder, and his half-sister, whom he adored, loved rollerblading. Then one day, during the long hot summer of that year, he was skating down a steep, winding road in one of Cape Town's southern suburbs. His sister was trailing close behind him when she slipped and punctured her lung on a collection of rocks by the wayside. "She died in my arms," he says, and he remembers how he could literally feel life exiting her body as she took her last breath.

A professional skateboarder and photographer, Kent is one of the participants in Mats Staub's long-term project *21,* in which he asks various individuals to recall their experience of coming of age. Initially, the audio-video project was designed by the Swiss artist for the reopening of Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, in 2012. At that time, he asked the residents of a nearby retirement home to recall their passage to adulthood. Staub went on to interview dozens of people in cities across Europe, from Belgrade to Zurich.

The turning point

"I see myself as a listener," Staub says, when we meet for our interview in Cape Town, South Africa. "I think it's a good thing to listen." We're sitting in a spartanly furnished office on the fourth floor of the Pan-African Market on Long Street, the busy thoroughfare that runs across the city centre in Cape Town. It's early summer, but the sky is grey and overcast. Although Staub's grandparents met and fell in love in Tanzania and lived there briefly, this is the artist's first trip to the continent. He is here with his collaborator Andrea Brunner, and they are about to begin a series of interviews for the project.

"The year I turned twenty-one was crucial for me," Staub says, explaining the personal origins of the project. Born in Bern in 1972, he studied theatre, journalism and religious studies, and worked as a journalist and a dramaturge at Theater Neumarkt in Zurich for a few years, before turning his attention to art in 2004. "I didn't understand it when I was twenty-one, but ten years later I start to think that was really the year" – the one that marked his transition to adulthood.

Just as Kent has done, all the participants are asked to begin telling their stories by stating the year in which they turned twenty-one. For the duration of the audio interview, Staub maintains an unobtrusive presence, guiding the conversation at times, but mostly listening. These conversations are recorded and later edited. Once this is done, Staub visits the participants again to film their facial expressions as they listen to the edited sound recordings played back to them. Their emotions range from joy to sadness as they reflect on the trajectories of their lives, the triumphs and heartbreaks. The video installation consists of storytellers listening to their own recollections. In this way, those who get to see the video installation become part of the listening experience, sharing this intimate moment with the respective narrator.

Artist Mats Staub in conversation with the author about his project *21*.

Photo: Kent Lingeveldt

"Sometimes I feel so close to somebody by listening to their stories," says Andrea Brunner, who edited some of the recordings. "Whatever bad situation they had to deal with, all of them had trouble with the same things in life, with family, with love." This is the transcendent aspect of the project: it breaks the boundaries of race, class and culture and it allows people who have grown up in disparate parts of the world and sometimes in vastly different circumstances to feel a deep connection with another human being.

When Kent told the story of his sister's tragic death, it prompted Staub to open up about the difficulty of dealing with the loss of his only brother who passed away in December 2014. "I feel like I'm behind glass because of the death of my brother," he said to Kent, sitting at the opposite end of a long wooden table. "Talking helps a lot."

Resilience and survival

Although *21* encourages participants to remember their past – a recurring theme in most of Staub's projects – the artist says he's "more interested in the present than in the past." More specifically, the influence of the past on the present: how our memories shape the people we become. Trauma is a constant present in the stories people tell about their coming of age. Days later in Johannesburg, Staub says they interviewed a woman who turned twenty-one in 1977, a notoriously violent period in South Africa's history as the apartheid regime grew more repressive in a desperate attempt to remain in power. A year before, in 1976, during the Soweto uprisings, state police shot to death and wounded hundreds of school children.

Coming of age in this uncertain time, surrounded by the percussion of gunfire, "she really didn't know how life would go on," Staub says when I interview him again on Skype. "There were so many funerals during this time." Today, you see the woman who "really experienced difficult things" and could not have imagined a future "with a smile on her face."

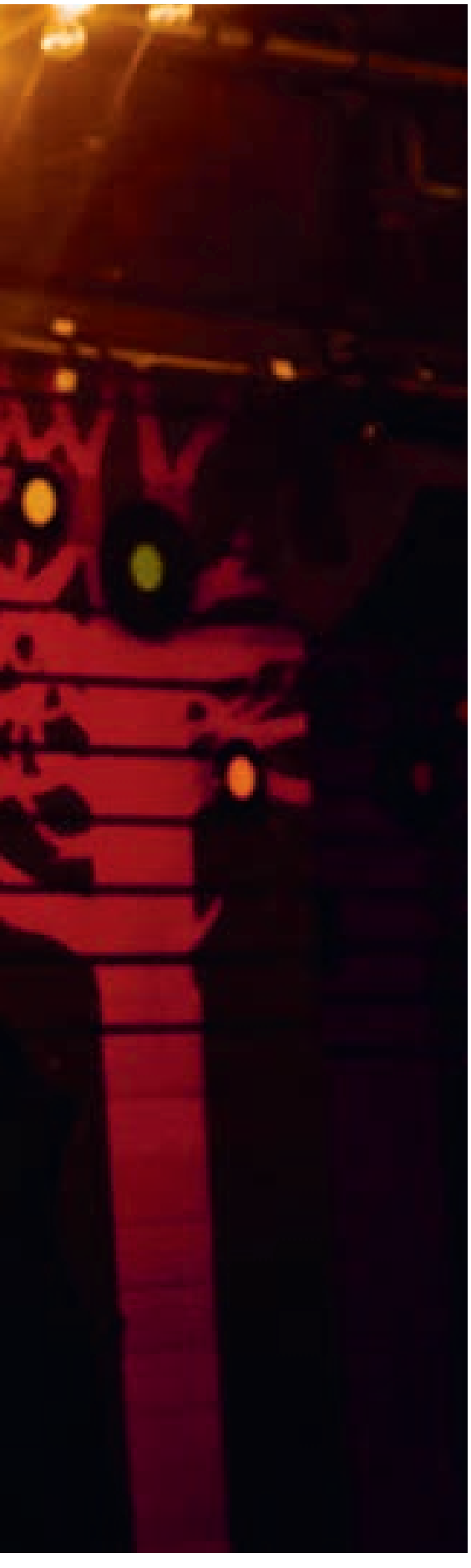
"More and more I have come to admire resilience," wrote the American poet Jane Hirshfield in her poem "Optimism." "Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one side, it turns in another."

The courage and resilience of human beings in the face of challenges run through the stories people tell Staub about their transition to adulthood. "When you see people, they survived," Staub says. "Everybody survived, you see them alive. You see them now and it's encouraging." Even if sometimes a residue of sadness remains, about people and things lost along the way, they survived. And perhaps that's the most important thing. They survived.

www.matsstaub.com

Bongani Kona is a freelance writer based in Cape Town. His work has appeared in *Rolling Stone* (South African edition), *Mail & Guardian, Sunday Times,* and many other publications and websites. He is also a contributing editor at *Chimurenga,* a pan-African magazine on culture, art and politics.

Hard work and some good luck: the French-speaking Swiss musical artist Verveine received a key career boost thanks to Opération Iceberg.



The Tip of the Iceberg

A pioneering cross-border initiative between French-speaking Switzerland and France aims to help young musical artists launch their careers.

By Roderic Mounir (text) and Carine Roth (photos)

Standing alone on stage, Verveine works the electronic apparatus on the table in front of her. Her microphone sticks out amid a swirl of cables. An androgynous blonde dressed all in black, the young francophone-Swiss singer has created a fascinating synthetic universe, dark and only apparently cool. Her versatile voice recalls Björk, while her music contains nods to trip-hop and robotic bass lines in the 1980s style of Depeche Mode, Yazoo and Kas Product. This evening she is opening for the New York trio Blonde Redhead at the Usine, an alternative venue in Geneva. The public gradually succumbs to her charm and her intriguing sounds. Verveine has the wind in her sails. The hard-working young performer is one of ten participants tapped for the pilot edition of Opération Iceberg, a promotional initiative for emerging musical artists.

The programme with the arctic-sounding name is an innovative cross-border coaching project that unites the French-speaking parts of Switzerland with France's Franche-Comté, Burgundy and Alsace regions. It is spearheaded by France's Eurockéennes de Belfort, one of Europe's largest summer music festivals, and the FCMA (Fondation romande pour la chanson et les musiques actuelles), francophone Switzerland's foundation for the support of new music. The name "Iceberg" was chosen to evoke the idea of outstanding elements moving in a shared body of water. By pooling their resources, the project's initiators hope to encourage innovation and cultural diversity while helping young talents achieve new professional levels.

Launched in 2013, the project's pilot phase came to an end in the spring of 2015. The ten participating musicians or groups reflect diverse styles, from pop-rock and folk to electronic music and hip-hop. Four hail from Switzerland: Verveine (Vevey), Billie Bird (Lausanne), Murmures Barbares (Neuchâtel) and Schwarz (Porrentruy/La Chaux-de-Fonds). The other six are from France: Cotton Claw (Besançon), Pih-Poh (Belfort), Sunless (Dijon), The Wooden Wolf (Mulhouse), D-Bangerz (Mulhouse) and Valy Mo (Mulhouse). The participants were chosen by programmers from participating music venues in the region: the Docks and the Romandie in Lausanne, the Case-à-chocs in Neuchâtel, the Bikini Test in La Chaux-de-Fonds and the SAS in Delémont. In France: the Poudrière in Belfort, the Rodia in Besançon, the Vapeur in Dijon and the Noumatrouff in Mulhouse.

FCMA director Marc Ridet is an enthusiastic supporter of the project. "Developing networks and training local members of the musical community are two of our primary goals." Based in Nyon, on Lake Geneva, the FCMA receives local public

funding as well as support from events like the Paléo Festival and Festi'Neuch. It has also already participated in cross-border exchanges like Walk The Line and Les Transvoisines – the pop-music cousins of pioneering musical events like JazzContreband and Suisse Diagonales Jazz.

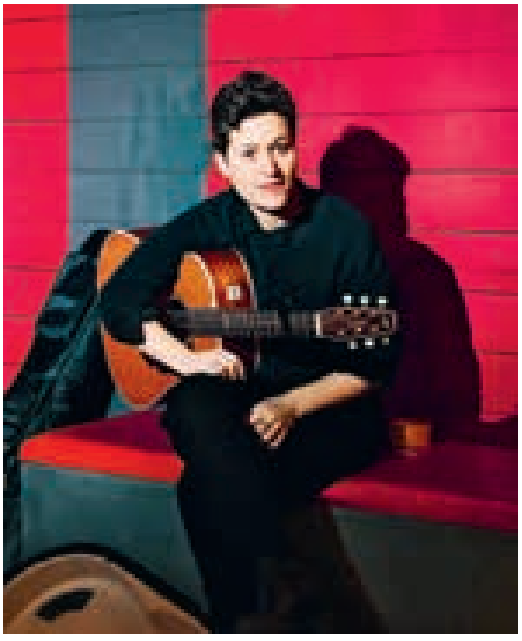
For Eurockéennes director Jean-Paul Roland, the advantages of these kinds of exchanges are self-evident. "In spite of the two magnets represented by the urban areas of Geneva and Lausanne, artists from the French-speaking parts of Switzerland develop within a small pond and are obliged to go abroad to build their careers." His festival, on the other hand, enjoys a national or even international reputation, but "is anchored first and foremost on a local level, from which we draw our legitimacy. Encouraging future talents is thus part of our mission."

Setting off a ripple effect

So how exactly does Opération Iceberg work? The project is divided into three phases: first, a residence period with outside coaches; second, instruction on subjects such as copyright, digital technologies and artistic mobility in the age of globalization; and finally, concerts on both sides of the border. During each phase, participants are required to produce log entries (in the form of blogs, radio reports, videos, etc) to be posted on the project's website and shared via social media. A CD containing one track by each participant has been produced and distributed to the media and to to industry professionals.

There are no formal contracts involved in Opération Iceberg: the project simply requires participants to sign an agreement that they will remain available for the entire duration of the programme, which runs in both one-year and two-year versions. They are expected to attend tutorials and provide material that can be used for promotional purposes. Travel costs, hotels, meals and a per diem of 150 Swiss francs are all covered by the programme.

Opération Iceberg's budget is just over one million Swiss francs. Half of that derives from the participating music clubs; the other half is provided through public funding. Contributors include the European Union as well as cross-border partners like the Belfort-Jura and Interreg funds. Within Switzerland, funding partners include: Pro Helvetia, Suisa, the Paléo Festival, Swiss Music Export, the cities of Lausanne, Neuchâtel, la Chaux-de-Fonds, and the canton of Neuchâtel. Needless to say, all of this represents a true logistical challenge.



The Jura-based band Schwarz and the Lausanne folk singer Billie Bird profited from tailor-made coaching and support.

The project's creators are very pleased with the results of the first round. "Ultimately, there were a lot more concerts than originally planned," says Jean-Paul Roland. "Opération Iceberg really set off a ripple effect." The participating artists

are equally satisfied. Verveine, for instance, saw a real career boost after her appearance at the Transmusicales festival in Rennes in December 2014. The hip French newspaper *Libération* sung her praises. She also opened for her residency coach Chapelier Fou at the Café de la Danse in Paris. "I hadn't known his work well before, but it turned out to be exactly the right choice. Chapelier Fou also uses electronics, and has mastered the technology down to his fingertips. We worked like mad for three days and three nights. Since then, I've been able to do much more with my own devices."

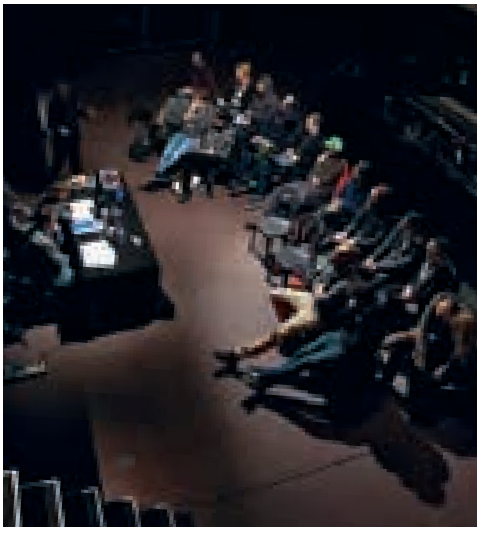
Verveine also polished her vocal skills with the Flemish singer-songwriter Ann Pierlé. "It was incredible. She's had a twenty-year career and shared so much with me." Four years after her first demos and an album *(Peaks)* released in late 2013, the singer with a background in classical piano has now signed with the Lausanne label Creaked Records (which also represents Oy, Larytta, and Gaspard de la Montagne). She recently released *Antony,* a new EP with seven tracks. Concerts dates are lining up, from Paris to Athens. Her future looks rosy, but there are still some fears: "There's a world of diference between the fantasy and the reality of a professional music career. As a solo artist, I've had to deal with many more aspects than I'd imagined. Opération Iceberg took me out of my isolation, provided me with valuable input, and brought me into a network."

Working hard to stand out

Billie Bird feels the same way. For the Lausanne-based raw-folk singer, "an artistic career is also about networking." Concerts like the ones she's now given – opening for Camélia Jordana in Dijon or for Benjamin Clementine at the Festival Antigel in Geneva – are worth their weight in gold. Backstage photos shared on Facebook were showered with "likes." "Now that record sales have collapsed, it's no longer about large profits, but about maintaining good relationships with a loyal fan base." For an emerging artist, social networks have become essential. "I do ask myself some questions about that, but when I post my news, I notice the impact right away. Still, you have to be careful not to become too dependent on them. Because then you worry about not being active enough, about not sharing news often enough, to continue to exist." Opération Iceberg exposed Billie Bird to the realities of the industry. "Some of the tutorials were very informative, especially the ones on copyright and licence fees."

When choosing residence placements for Billie Bird, the organizers took her specific needs into account. Since she writes in English although it is not her mother tongue, they arranged for her to spend two days at the SAS club in Delémont working with Matt Elliott, a British songwriter and arranger whose style is radically different from her own. "He writes drinking songs that last ten minutes, while I write lyrics about everyday states of mind, in the pure folk tradition. It was fun to have our universes collide. We spent the first evening talking about everything under the sun. Then we started from scratch, reworked lyrics, and experimented with different ways of expressing the same idea." During a second residence, she concentrated on musical arrangements under the guidance of Marcello Giuliani, a member of the Eric Truffaz Quartet and album producer for (among others) Sophie Hunger, Anna Aaron, and The Young Gods.

For the members of the Jura-based group Schwarz, who play a sophisticated and catchy form of "dark electro pop", the experience was particularly beneficial, because the group had just been formed when they joined the project. "Some of us already had 800 concerts under our belts, others only 5," explains guitarist Jonathan Nido, a veteran of two hardcore/metal groups, Coilguns and The Ocean. The group's residency at the Rodia in Besançon helped to fine-tune their set structure, stage presence and the fluidity of the transitions between songs. "It all depends on what you're looking for," Jonathan reflects. "It wouldn't have made sense to do a residency with a hardcore group, where the emphasis is on energy and spontaneity. Pop music is a different universe. You have to work hard to stand out, because you're playing with very well-established codes." Schwarz released an eponymous album in late 2014 with the Jura-based label Hummus Records.



Support for performing and networking: two ways Opération Iceberg helps young artists.

Now that the pilot phase has ended, what will happen to Opération Iceberg? "We would like to establish it as a permanent project," says Jean-Paul Roland. "We are working together with lawyers and programmers on an 'artistic mobility kit' which will make it easier to hire musicians from across the border. For the moment, though, that project is facing obstacles related to French laws on the social status of artists and on pre-authorizations for booking concerts." The project's organizers would also like to extend it to include additional regions, such as the canton of Basel, which also shares a border with France. The francophone Swiss music scene remains dynamic but relatively isolated. An expanded Opération Iceberg would help to increase its visibility and its mobility.

"The participants reflect diverse styles, from pop-rock and folk to electronic music and hip-hop."

Roderic Mounir is a musician and a music journalist for the Geneva daily newspaper *Le Courrier.* He co-authored the book *Post Tenebras Rock, une épopée électrique, 1983–2013* (Éditions La Baconnière, 2013), a history of the legendary Geneva concert association.

Carine Roth (b. 1971) lives in Lausanne and works as a photographer and photo editor. Her artistic practice focuses on installations combining image, text and sound.

Translated from the French by Marcy Goldberg

Experiencing Scenography at the Prague Quadrennial

A vast swimming-pool complex in Prague is the site of Eric Linder's concert performance *Podolí Wave*.

Under the Tail of the Horse: this title groups together the various events and exhibitions representing Switzerland at the Prague Quadrennial, the world's foremost scenography event. The Swiss presence in Prague was curated by a team of experts appointed by Pro Helvetia. On 18 June they will jointly launch the exhibition under the equestrian statue of Wenceslas, the saint who gave his name to the famous square in the city centre. With their installation *Wenceslas Line*, which is several hundred metres in length, Markus Lüscher and Erik Steinbrecher offer an altered perspective on the historic square. Eric Linder's event *Podolí Wave* – a concert by the Swiss bands OY and Sunfast at the imposing Podolí swimming-pool complex – was shaped by a similar wish to create a shift in perspective. Audiences can experience the *Wave* from the stands or in the water. *Reception*, the third Swiss contribution, showcases photographic works by Iren Stehli and Rishabh Kaul. These can be seen at the Clam Gallas Palace, one of the festival's centres. Parallel to the events taking place in Prague, the Haus für Kunst Uri in central Switzerland also features a programme on related themes. For the occasion, the artist duo Lang/Baumann presents scenographic alterations to the museum, in line with the theme of new perspectives.

www.sharedspace.ch

Photo : Eric Linder

Discussing Design

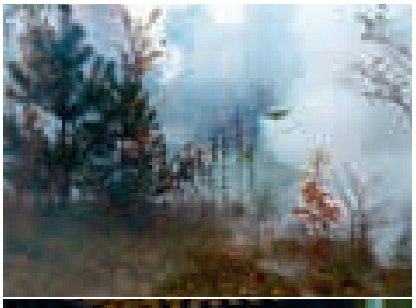
How can designers influence companies? How does rebranding work? These and other questions are at the heart of the second annual Design Day, taking place this year on 17 June 2015 parallel to the Swiss Design Awards at the Messe Basel exhibition centre. Its goals: to coordinate support initiatives for design, and to build bridges between creative talents and the market. For these purposes, Pro Helvetia has invited selected experts to meet young designers and answer their questions. Also planned are presentations by young designers of their products and brands.

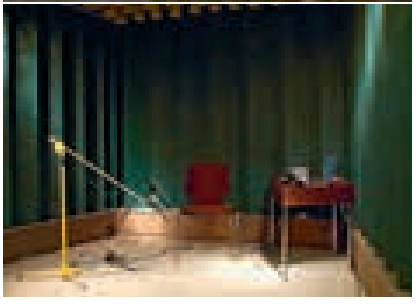
Design Day takes place as the joint initiative of four national institutions offering public or private support for design: Pro Helvetia, the Federal Office of Culture, the Engagement Migros Creative Hub and the Design Prize Switzerland.

www.prohelvetia.ch

Experts and designers in conversation at last year's Design Day.

Cahiers d'Artistes





Film stills from *Offscreen* and *Setting*, from Gabriela Löffel's *Cahier d'Artiste*, Series XII, 2015.

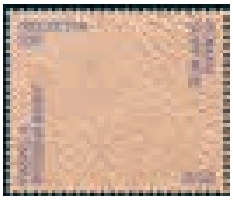
With its *Collection Cahiers d'Artistes* series, Pro Helvetia supports promising Swiss artists by providing them with a first solo publication. The series, which is produced every two years, makes an important contribution to the promotion of the visual arts. The series is now to be accompanied by a blog featuring information about current exhibitions and publications by the selected artists. The website also features the impressive list of all the monographs produced in the series since its inception in 1984, from Fischli/Weiss to Pipilotti Rist, Valentin Carron, Davide Cascio and Claudia Comte, all the way to the artists of the current Series XII, 2015: Thomas Bonny, Delphine Chapuis Schmitz, Daniel Karrer, Gabriela Löffel, Sara Masüger, Filib Schürmann, Miki Tallone and Benjamin Valenza. The eight current *Cahiers d'Artistes* are on display at this year's LISTE | Art Fair Basel from 16 to 21 June. The new blog will go online at the same time.

cahiers.ch

Material Products

Speculative realism rejects the idea of the world as a construction, and human beings as the measure of all things. This philosophical movement is reflected in art works that foreground their materials, while the importance of the artist recedes into the background. *Our Product* is the title of the show by Pamela Rosenkranz featured at the Swiss Pavilion for the 56th Art Biennale in Venice this year. For her exhibition, the Swiss artist designed a room-sized pool full of skin-coloured liquid moving in gentle waves. With this work, she invokes obsessions with consumerism, sport, plastic surgery and digital immortality, thus raising questions about the autonomy of human beings and their bodies, as well as playing with aspects of science, technology and medicine.
The exhibition was curated by Susanne Pfeffer, director of the Fridericianum in Kassel. The Salon Suisse, the official Swiss event programme at the Palazzo Trevisan, features a reflection on the Dada movement. *S.O.S. DADA – The World Is A Mess* is the title of the series curated by Juri Steiner and Stefan Zweifel. The Swiss presence at the Venice Biennale (9 May to 22 November) is organized under the auspices of Pro Helvetia. To mark the occasion, Pamela Rosenkranz has designed a stamp for Swiss Post with a particularly haptic quality. Recalling the colour and texture of human skin, it is closely linked to her Venice exhibition, and unites materiality and humanity within the smallest of frames.

www.biennials.ch



Swiss postage stamp by Pamela Rosenkranz.

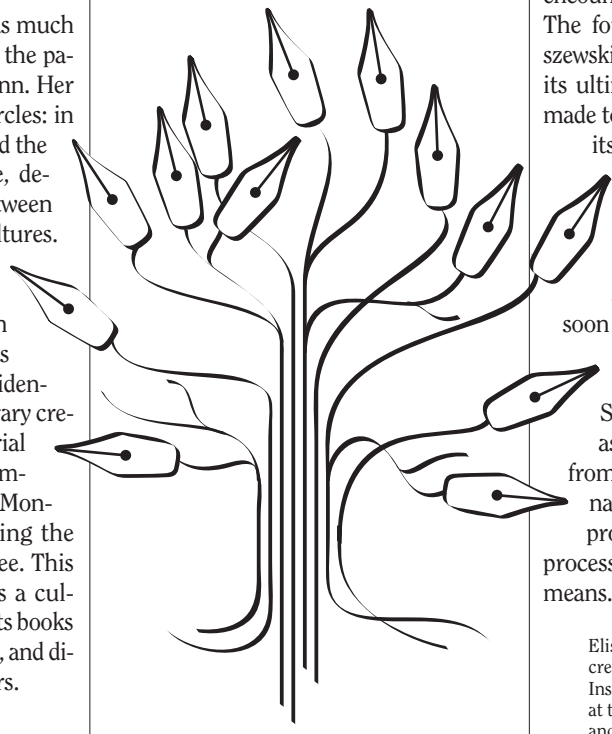
PARTNER

A Landscape For Literature

The Jan Michalski Foundation provides a fertile space for writers and readers.

By *Elisabeth Jobin* – The Jan Michalski Foundation for Writing and Literature is not a place one comes across by chance: it is as remote as it is iconic. Located in Montricher, at the foot of the Jura vaudois, it faces the long Alpine range that extends beyond Lake Geneva. The venue's architect, Vincent Mangeat, a native of the Jura area, sought to reflect the breadth of the scenery, choosing the lightest of shapes in order to dramatize the encounter between nature and literature. The roof's openwork catches the eye from afar: a tent-like canopy extending over the library, the exhibition hall and the auditorium.

This promise of calm, made as much to readers as to authors, is due to the patronage of Vera Michalski-Hoffmann. Her name is well-known in literary circles: in 1986, she and her husband founded the Noir sur Blanc publishing house, devoted to developing networks between Eastern and Western European cultures. After her husband's premature death, she continued his work, creating the Jan Michalski Foundation for Writing and Literature in his honour in 2004. The foundation's identity is based on the diversity of literary creation, but it refuses any set editorial lines, in the interest of an all-encompassing embrace of literature. At Montricher, the many steps comprising the life of a book are there for all to see. This philanthropic institution pursues a cultural promotion policy that presents books through living literature, exchange, and dialogue between authors and readers.



Celebrating writing

"We started from scratch, in order to create a microclimate to support literature. Our long-term goal is to curb the erosion of reading," says Michalski. "I had noticed that something along those lines was missing in French-speaking Switzerland, and wanted to make up for that." The foundation is rooted in the francophone Swiss literary scene, but aims to extend its influence internationally. In 2007 – two years before construction got underway in Montricher – the Foundation began funding book fairs and one-off literary events on behalf of people who tend not to come into contact with books. Requests tripled last year: in 2014, the total amount allotted for support and grants increased to 1.5 million Swiss Francs.

At the heart of the building, the library stands out as an impressive four-storey structure in solid oak. It opened its doors to the public in January 2013, and already comprises nearly 50,000 books acquired from independent bookstores throughout Switzerland and Europe. Readers can access a sampling of modern and contemporary literature from around the world. Pride of place is granted to volumes in their original languages, together with a selection of French translations. In addition, the collection focuses on current developments in literature, boasting nearly a hundred literary journals. The Foundation Prize, awarded annually by a jury composed of authors with different native tongues and affinities, also celebrates diversity in writing.

Books and buildings

At Montricher, books are subjects for endless exploration and questioning. The exhibition hall's modular design showcases graphic works linking words and images, while the auditorium is a space for public encounters with various authors of the day. The foundation's director, Pierre Lukaszewski, comments: "This is sponsorship in its ultimate form. Every effort has been made to support books – from the writing itself to promotion and distribution, reception and financing." Under construction for four years now, the Foundation continues to grow and add new elements. On either side of the central canopy, there will soon be a string of "cabins" – oversized boxes designed by different architects and suspended on cables. Starting in 2016, these will serve as housing for writers-in-residence from around the world. It will be the final step in an ambitious construction project whose goal is to render the process of writing through architectural means.

Elisabeth Jobin (b. 1987) earned a degree in creative writing from the Swiss Literary Institute before taking up studies in art history at the University of Bern. She is a novelist and a freelance journalist.

Translated from the French by Margie Mounier

Partner profiles public and private cultural institutions within Switzerland and around the world.

Illustration: Raffinerie

Eureka!

By *Michèle Roten* – I'm just finishing writing my first play, and I'm already a little sad that it's almost over. I hadn't expected to be. Because the thing with me and the theatre is: I'm not really a fan.

I mean, I like it a lot in theory. But in practice, we never clicked somehow. How often have I sat through performances, irked at all the familiar clichés being played out on stage. Once again all the actors are naked, except for the SS officer. Everyone is screaming at one other, as usual. Or litres of fake blood are flowing – without any good reason, as far as I can tell. Most of the time, it's simply too long-winded for me. When the wordplay seems endless, when I've gone ten minutes without a clue about what's happening, when I have no idea who is speaking, where we are, and why that woman is laughing as she rams a knife up her vagina: I'm out of there.

But the biggest problem I had with the theatre is that I usually felt left out. Like going to an office party without actually working for the company. Theatre is a highly self-referential system.

Things only grew worse when I got a glimpse behind the scenes. I left more than one meeting feeling stumped, because I hadn't understood a single one of the allusions or references to other plays, playwrights, directors or performances. To me it sounded like this: "I think the staging should be blabla." – "Yes, just like at the Bla theatre under director Blabla." – "That was much too bla for me, I would have preferred more blabla." – "Or some bla!" And then everyone would laugh. Except me.

So I had my doubts when the project started. But on the other hand, I was really looking forward to it. Because the journalism thing had pretty much fizzled out for me by then. Because there's nothing I like writing more than dialogue. And because it was something completely different, for once. No time pressure. A whole year. Amazing.

The first thing I did was spend a lot of time thinking about the fact that I was supposed to write a play. I made notes. I marked interesting passages in books and magazines. I imagined that the idea for a play comes over a writer like an epiphany. A bright light, a tingling sensation, *Eureka!* But somehow, that didn't happen. At one point, a friend told me about something that had happened to her. I couldn't get it out of my head. But by the time I finally had the idea of using it for the play, a few more weeks had gone by. And then the time came to really start writing.

I had my expectations about that, too. I pictured myself on a retreat. Somewhere in the mountains, with no distractions, and two weeks just to write. Early to bed, early to rise. Writing, writing, writing. But when it emerged that organizing this retreat would be difficult, I realized that I simply had to begin somehow. Just like an article, a column, a "regular" text. I had enormous difficulties getting started. I twisted and resisted, time went by, and suddenly I was facing a deadline after all. Dammit.

I was only able to start at all thanks to a computer program I found. Quite simply, it provided a format that made it easier to write in dialogue form. I tried it out, and typed a little bit, and when I stopped, I had a scene there.

And now I'll soon be done and it's sad somehow. Because after a while, the characters turned into friends. They developed and changed, and often they surprised me too. Those were the best times: when something happened all by itself, and I was just a bystander. Times when I watched and forgot everything else around me, while a story unfolded before my eyes.

Just like being at the theatre.

Michèle Roten (b. 1979) is an author and columnist. She studied German literature, sociology and criminology, and lives with her family in Zurich. For the 2014–2015 season, she was writer in residence at the Konzert Theatre in Bern. Her new play premiered in Bern in early June 2015.

Translated from the German by Marcy Goldberg

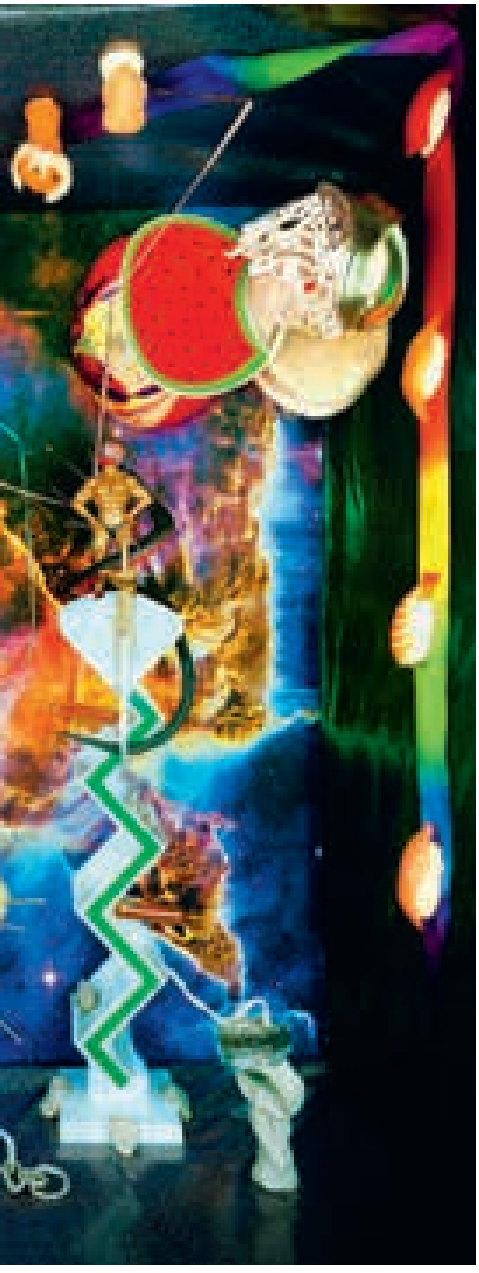
Illustration: Alice Kolb

GALLERY

Emile Barret

Transmissions:
La Psychologie (Syndrome du Collectionneur)
La Philosophie (Tetrapharmakon)
La Linguistique (Orateur)
2013

105 × 139 cm



Emile Barret (b. 1989) grew up on the outskirts of Paris. In 2012 he received a Bachelor of Arts in photography from the École Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne (ECAL). His graduation project won a Swiss Design Award in 2013. That same year, he won the audience award at the Festival de Mode et de Photographie in Hyères.

For his work, Barret tends to favour large formats. His dense compositions recall new, associative landscapes. By combining highly diverse systems of references, his collage-like photographs undermine conventional ways of seeing and inspire spectators to draw their own conclusions.

Barret has participated in many solo and group shows in Europe, Africa and Asia. The exhibition *Macération des Simples, Darkroom, Lis Popolit Sacàrides, Nootropics Fitness, des phénomènes préoccupants…*, features new works created for the show by Barret and photographic artist Fabrice Schneider, and can be seen until 20 June 2015 at the Galerie d'(A) in Lausanne. Barret's project *LLIAISONS* was created during a studio fellowship in London. It will be on view until 23 August 2015 as part of the *reGeneration3* exhibition at the Musée de l'Élysée in Lausanne.

www.emilebarret.com

In each *Passages* issue, *Gallery* presents a work by a Swiss artist.

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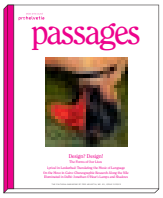

Design? Design!
No. 61

Here and There: Art, Society and Migration
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“The border between public and private is a place where there should be a hard boundary, rather than a soft one… The sense of what is public and what is rightly private is being lost.”

Of Borders and Boundaries
Richard Sennett, interviewed by Anne McElvoy, p. 8

“This is how things are done in the twenty-first century, in the pop scene and elsewhere: in shifting collectives, with fluid boundaries between friendship and the professional division of labour. Collaboration instead of commitment; loose networks, not love stories.”

Rock the Dropbox
Christoph Fellmann, p. 26

“Today’s relevant issues start out in the research lab. But getting them out of the lab and closer to the people is still a task for the arts.”

The Art of Explaining Science
Roland Fischer, p. 29

www.prohelvetia.ch/passages/en