

ANJA MÜLLER | FUTURE VOICES | A RESEARCH Report

Together with Dennis Deter (Choreographer/Musician/Philosopher) I was researching in the field of voices of humans and other animals and species in the period from 14th of December 2020 till 24th of January 2021.

For us this was a very special research period. Due to the Covid lockdown, we spent our working time mostly in home office or outside in the parks and forests of Berlin. The lack of a studio, where moving is fully possible shaped the search in a way, that we were sinking into a more theoretical and voicing search. We had though 3 days á 3 hours a studio at Uferstudios. We used it fully just to move and to take space. It has been emotional 9 hours, cause it showed us how much a space like Uferstudios, where you have time and space to move and express in a different way, where you can leave words behind and translate it into another language, where you meet other people and artists to exchange, how much a space like this is important for our work and how much we are missing it in these times.

Reserach Field

Future voices is a research in voices. We were interested in finding words, speeches, meanings, sounds of forgotten or under-represented voices, as well as imagining unheard voices of the present out of a perspective of the future. Why is a voice heard and why do others disappear? Female voices in all categories, poor people, minorities, animals and plants, other species, different frequencies, weak or too high, fragile or breaking... How does an unfiltered egalitarian democracy sound like?

In the first weeks we went in search of human speeches of forgotten or under-represented voices. Since we were mostly restricted to the use of a home office due to the Covid-lockdown, we spent a lot of time in theoretical research.

We started with political voices, reading and listening to a lot of speeches. Our focus was on speeches by often marginalized voices or speeches that had marginalization/discrimination as a topic. Of course there were a lot of famous speeches that jumped into our eyes and ears, like the Eulogy of reverend Al Sharpton at the funeral of George Floyd, Carolin Emckes speech for the „Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels“, or Greta Thunbergs speech at the UN climate summit amongst many more. It was very inspiring to have a look at the built up of successful speeches and to think about - despite their purpose - what made them so powerful and why they reached and talked to so many people.

And although these speeches were all very informative, it proved difficult to dive deeper into a realm of not only marginalized, but „unheard“ voices, as we had planned. We came upon practical difficulties, experiencing the paradoxon of finding or listening to unheard voices.

More and more (and maybe also through quite some time spending outside in the nature) our focus shifted. Away from human voices and human language, away from the expression of voices in the form of speech(es), and towards a multi-species approach that encompassed all kinds of vocal expressions.

We got interested in questions like: Can animals have a political voice? Can we get closer to (understanding) them, by mimicking their expressions, their sounds? What can a practice of just-listening be like and how can it transform our artistic approach of expression?

Working Methods & Practices

silent walks - sound walks

In a practical way, we had to deal a lot with the special circumstances of researching during a lockdown.

Every day we started by having a walk of 1 1/2 hours, only to come back to our flat that had magically transformed into an office by then. We used the walk to sometimes talk about our progress, but mostly listen to the sounds around us. Fragments of talks between people, the singing of birds and scuttling of squirrels, the sound of winds dancing in plants and trees. Especially after shifting to a broader approach to vocal expression, the time outside became very precious and inspiring to us. It became a practice. And the silent sound walks started to take longer times and went through different environments: Forests, city street walks, parks...It felt very good, as a human and as an artist, for a change to just spend your time humbly listening to nature around you. We experienced, that if you are doing sound walks you remember that place really well, it becomes a conscious place, it becomes a place of a relationship. So when you are listening you are creating relationships.

communication with non-human animals

Also we tried ways of communicating with mice, squirrels and birds (sparrows, crows and tits, mainly) with varying success. By being close to them for a long time and trying to fit naturally into the environment. By mimicking their sounds. By feeding them.

Reading

Reading and literature became an overall important part of our research. Although we shifted from human voices and the emphasis of speeches to scientific literature about animals and inter-species relations (f.e. „When animals speak“, „Being a beast“, „The sexual politics of meat“).

listening - collecting

Next to reading we followed our practice of listening. After assembling and listening to a collection of different more or less important speeches (mainly by women, sometimes by in one way or another marginalized people), we started a personal archive of natural sounds, especially animal voices. A next step will be to buy a portable recorder and also make field recordings of our own, collecting the sounds of places that we came to know very well, passing through daily or resting for a period of shorter and longer times.

voicing - collaging - embodying

In the short hours of having a studio by the end of our research, we just relished in coming back to moving practices, that are not possible at home.

At the home office, we gave ourselves practical tasks in the usage of our voices - poetic singing approaches without words, creating sonic landscapes through a looper or starting a vocabulary of archaic sounds. We also made short videos, using sounds of different animals and combining them with casual human situations, trying to embody and imitate the voices of buffalos, sheep and nightingales as perfectly as possible.

Outlook

This research time was a very precious possibility to dive into a more broader and initially not goal oriented re-search.

We took first steps into a very wide field.

We were able to gently shift and narrow down our thematic focus, through a lot of texts, talks and practical tasks.

In general, this research opened up a lot of doors and questions.

We are very eager to continue the search and are very interested to broaden our exploration to interspecies communication. I am working with Jared Gradinger on communicating with and relating to plants of the garden at HZT. I think this work can feed my quest and even widen an understanding of what communicating means and if language (as using reasonable human made words) is in itself a misunderstood concept.

We are very much interested in heading forward with a theoretical investigation but mainly we cant wait of getting more physical, playful and poetical with all the information that we gained.

We are aiming to work on a new creation with this content as a source for 2022.

It could either be a stage performance or maybe as well a performative film. Now that we tried short video sequences we got quite fascinated by using film as a format.

Thank you very much for supporting my work trustfully in these difficult times.