

LLB residency REPORT
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During the LLB residency at ICI/CCN Montpellier I started the research and the work for *Extinction Room*. The residency started on the 4th of March, after less than a month from the premiere of *Hopeless*. at Radialsystem in Berlin. I was certainly still digesting the last process and the feedback we got for the piece and it felt almost like being in therapy, slightly too early to be back in the studio. It turned out that it was a healthy process... Still reflecting on the last work, and already with plans to expand parts of the previous project into a new piece.

I often work with a certain continuity. Every project opens some new directions in the thinking and in the practice. Usually the next step is super obvious and it's always informed by the accumulation of knowledge, that we gather with every project.

If *Hopeless*. was a project that started from pastoral poetry, from greek and roman antiquity, it's because before that, in "*Neverendings*" I was working with epic poems, in order to "glorify" 100 years of the (failed) "communist" utopia, — which was a very personal way of dealing with my eastern European identity. In *Hopeless*. the pastoral genre served to reflect on how to sing the beauty of nature in our times, during climate crisis and the beginning of the 6th mass extinction event. This is how the first part of the piece became the *Extinction Room*, where the performers are shepherding extinct animals, or rather their remains : recorded sounds (digitalised data) of extinct animal species, while they recount their extinction narratives. This was in *Hopeless*. only the introduction (40 min. long, out of a 2h 30 min total duration, with species of amphibians, birds and mammals), a performative sound installation, before taking the audience in the theatre space.

In February, before the residency in Montpellier, at the invitation of Andreea Capitanescu, who co-curated together with Dirk Vermaelen the performative interventions in the Brancusi exhibition at BOZAR Brussels during Europalia festival, I introduced *Extinction Room*, as it was still hovering and resonating in my head after the freshly premiered show in Berlin. I proposed an extended version of the performative sound installation, connecting the extinction narratives of real bird species to Brancusi's bird sculptures. I compared the solidity of the bronze that the sculptures are made of with the scientific data about extinct birds. Also we discussed the high costs of the insurance to protect Brancusi's birds and the absence of funding for conservation efforts for critically endangered bird species around the world. This perverse discrepancy is part of a world where the loss of biodiversity is the new normal.

The work to an extended version of *Extinction Room* was ready to begin. And indeed it did, few weeks later at ICI/CCN Montpellier. (Even from the first dinner we had in Montpellier we knew that we were in the right place: we went to an Indian / Mauritius restaurant and their beers were Dodo and Phoenix, the emblematic extinct bird and the mythological master bird. It was a great sign and a wonderful beginning.)

Thus the residency in Montpellier was used to look into more bird species that went extinct or are critically endangered.

The criteria were:

- beauty of their callings and singing
- sound quality of the online accessible data (we used mainly 2 online sound libraries: Macaulay Library and Xeno-Canto.)
- the incredible factors and causes that caused extinction
- great plans and conservation efforts
- myths and legends originating in traditional cultures related to the specific disappeared birds.

In the studio in Montpellier we had a 4 channel sound installation so we tried to combine different birds that would occupy the speakers and share the room. We made odd pairings, in order to find out which bird sounds work good with each other...

The list became unfortunately very long. So many bird species went extinct already and so many are critically endangered!!! The sadness began to extend as well.

The sorrow and the heaviness of the matter started to weigh on us. We had to think of ways to keep it light. But we soon realised that there is no space for humour in *Extinction Room*.

While selecting birds and looking for their myths and legends, I was also reading *Ethno-Ornithology — Birds, Indigenous Peoples, Culture and Society*, edited by Sonia Tidemann and Andrew Gosler.

Also I used the time in Montpellier to have a closer look at Brancusi's work, especially the bird series. Apparently he sculpted *Maiastra* after he saw Stravinsky's ballet "The Firebird". So I looked into different versions of the ballet. I considered parts of the score as possible inserts in the *Extinction Room*. *Maiastra* is a mythical bird present in Romanian folklore and has similarities to the Slavic tales about the firebird. I looked into old Romanian folk songs and tales about this mythical bird. The idea of non-existent birds, or birds that were so rare that they were thought as magical, came to my attention. Birds from fairy tales became as real as extinct bird species.

We also looked at queer and feminist reading of Brancusi's work through Anna C. Chave book "Shifting the bases of art". It became interesting to look at extinction from the gender politics perspective.

The physical practice started to go toward folk and speculative reconstruction of folk dance objects. It was also a way to relate to the beautiful sounds of lost nature. Also a way to deal with the trauma and the accumulation of losses. Extinction noise translated well into noise body, a choreographic accumulation I was working with in the past, a by-product of VTB.

I always work with the practice I developed which is called the Visible Thinking Body (VTB). It's a set of tools to navigate the body in motion. It can operate as a search engine ... the artefacts or data that we find gets different treatments in order to become performative folk or pseudo folk dance objects.

The residency in Montpellier at the beginning of the new work was ideal. Such a healthy way to exit a project that barely came to its finalisation, and to continue on its still resonating intense echoes in order to take it further into a more refined and detailed work with such an important topic.

Thank you, again, for the wonderful and very inspiring time at ICI/CCN Montpellier. The working conditions are great!