

## **DANCE RESEARCH #14 NRW in Dortmund**

**Interview at the end of the residency  
“Voicing Pieces”**

**Performer and choreographer: Begüm  
Erciyas**

**Technical support and artistic collaborator: Matthias Meppelink**

*Begüm and Matthias, can you tell us first what you have been working on in recent years, and how your collaboration for this project was born?*

Matthias: In the past few years since I studied Applied Theatre in Giessen, I have worked in many different constellations as a sound designer and dramaturge. Among others I have worked with Boris Nikitin, Marcel Schwald and Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt, who ultimately provided the momentum for a productive cooperation between Begüm and myself. Even though it was not always clear to me during the work process, in hindsight it seems the issue that keeps coming up is dilettantism – dilettantism as an artistic strategy and in the best sense.

Begüm: In the last years I did different pieces for the stage, very often depending on the audience to accept the proposal, enter some kind of complicity with the piece and play along with their imagination. We have been in contact with Matthias, exchanging about projects and wanting to work together already for 2 years. For Dance Research NRW finally our schedules matched each other and now we are planning to collaborate on the continuation of Voicing Pieces.

*How did you start working on this project? In the first phase of the residency, Begüm, you walked all over Dortmund to find specific locations and to interview*

*people from the city. What was the goal? What was your experience of Dortmund?*

Begüm: Our work in Dortmund was a research process, which was hinting at a project to come in the future. For me, artistic research is the search for what matters truly and concerns one deeply within any proposed theme. And for me, it is very important to take the time for research, i.e. the search for one's central interest, before starting any project.

For us the main theme in Dance Research NRW was from the beginning on the voice, and in particular the voice of the audience or the passer-by. So, sometimes alone, sometimes with Matthias, I was walking through the city brainstorming ways of putting one's own voice into play. I was especially looking for buildings, areas, corners, that would attract my attention and which one could address with one's own voice. My first attraction was towards the Phoenix See – an artificial sea built in a former industrial area- and the heavy gentrification going on around it, i.e. offices and lofts built in a worker's residential district. I played around with the idea of how it would be to address different corners and perspectives in this area as “you” rather than “it”. Our second point of interest was of course the Nordmarkt, a poor and socially conflicted area. Here, we were speculating on how it would be to start a Speaker's Corner in this park.

While reflecting on all these possibilities, it became clear for us that if we ask anybody to give voice to our texts, that they had to be in a private and protected space. We were afraid that “participation” and the (re)presentation of any given text would be the focus, if we would not create a situation, in which one would be alone with one's voice.

Eventually, it became a priority for us that the location(s) are close to the festival center and easily accessible for festival

audience. Close to the festival center, we had the option between busy shopping areas or calmer non-places. We chose to avoid the commercial vibe.

Matthias: Begüm had explored Dortmund in advance so intensively that our joint investigation tours were finished rather quickly, within a few days. Our common impression was that the protected environment of the festival FAVORITEN has been very favorable for our work (both geographically and in terms of content) and I enjoyed Dortmund very much. For example, I found it remarkable how curious people were about our “strange” installations in their neighborhoods.

*Where does your interest in public speaking and the act of speaking come from? How do you define public speech? I am sure you did research on the various theories or doctrines of public speaking. Who has influenced you in this matter? And why are you interested in this as a topic for your work in dance and for this research project? What is dance for you in this context?*

Matthias: I am very much interested in the untrained voice, the pop voice and, indeed, the amateurish voice. Diedrich Diederichsen is of course a very important reference for me. His essay “Stimme und Parlamentarismus” in “Mainstream der Minderheiten: Pop in der Kontrollgesellschaft” (Ed. Tom Holert und Mark Terkessidis) has always excited and intrigued me in relation to this project.

Begüm: Writings that influenced me and triggered more and more interest in the voice so far have been Mladen Dolar, Bojana Kunst, Inke Arns and Brandon LaBelle. In the research we also used a lot of quotes from Dale Carnegie, a writer from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

who wrote a lot of books about public speaking.

I believe that nowadays the borders between artistic genres have become irrelevant and I find it really not interesting to define “dance”. However, I come from a background of choreography, which influences the way I look at changes in time and space, as well as my sense of rhythm and timing. I enjoy applying principles of composition and tools of theater onto different – maybe unexpected - elements (in this case: the text and the voice), in order to discover their performative potential.

*You have been working for some time with objects on the stage. Can you explain more precisely why? And what importance do the objects (balls / bowls in the tent) have in this dance research?*

Begüm: In the past, I have worked often with objects, such as ping pong balls (“Ballroom”), chocolate rabbits (“Double”) and Euro-bills (“Mani-cure” and “A Speculation”) as the protagonists of a piece. Collaborating performers were often given the role to facilitate these objects to become subjects, by observing and understanding their materiality and their natural inclination towards movement. During the process, performers addressed these objects often verbally. Sometimes they communicated a score to the objects, instructed them to move; sometimes they questioned their physical existence; and sometimes they treated them with a pseudo-therapeutic intention.

“Talking to an object” started always as an absurd task. As the scene developed, we all indulged in the imagination that this object could hear or sense us and even react to our words. Eventually, this engagement with a joke - a nonsense task – became the trigger for a fully theatrical moment. In these and other performances, I have often asked perform-

ers and audiences to accept the promises of the ridicule, in order to create an imagined realm and impossible possibilities.

In the research for “Voicing Pieces”, I wanted to continue to work with objects that become the addressee of our desires, curses and imaginations, while focusing this time on the voice that turns this encounter into a theatrical illusion or a temporary reality.

However, I must admit, throughout the process in Dortmund I started doubting more and more, if the object as an addressee is really of central importance for Voicing Pieces.

*How did you split the work and how did the collaboration develop?*

Matthias: I think we started out as relative equals and without strong specialization in this project. Sure, each of us has his super powers, but I hope to be able to speak for both of us when I say that we have played creative ping-pong quite well, in the development of the texts for example.

*How did the concept with the two tents come up for the presentation at the end of your residency?*

Matthias: There were two tents hanging vertically on walls in public spaces. You could put your head through a hole to look inside. There the visitor was confronted with a sort of mini-black-box theater and a text which he was supposed to read aloud.

In one tent the viewer was asked to address the reading of the text to a particular object. In the other tent, the focus was more on how to learn to use one's voice in the public sphere. If viewers read the text out loud, they were rewarded with a

couple of miniature theatrical effects going on inside the tent.

The tents were a result of our experiences in the city. We were under the impression that in order to use one's own voice and to share it aloud, one needs a protected space. The inhibition threshold is big for many viewers. And that corresponds to the experience we had during the installation. Those people who knew that this was a project in the context of the festival were relatively quickly ready to bury their heads in one of the tents and read the text aloud. On the other hand it was hardly imaginable for random passersby and it rarely happened.

*How do you see your relationship with the audience in general and specifically in this work?*

Matthias: This work actually produced a strangely intimate situation for the two of us. In the tent we had installed a microphone through which we were able to listen to the visitor on our headphones. There was no visual contact. As a result, a very strange moment of intimate witness emerged, a bit like in a confession. Generally, I like it when audience and performer (in the broadest sense) do not hide from each other, especially if the audience is not hidden from the actors. I always find it a bit strange when the room lights go out. In this case it was the other way around.

Begüm: The setup we created for this work is particularly exciting me, because it proposes a model of participation that is not “audience participation” in the classical sense. The audience members don't carry any responsibility towards the makers of the piece nor towards other audience members. They are not there to “help” nor to “represent”. They are solely performing for themselves.

The audience members are putting their voice into play to facilitate their very own experience. Their only responsibility is towards themselves. They are audience and actor at once. Each one is a passive audience of his/her own activity – blurring the difference between an active and a passive position, as well as the difference between speaking and hearing.

*What do you take with you after this research in Dortmund? How do you want to develop this material? Are there any ideas for a concrete production?*

We want to work towards a parcours of a series of tents in the theater. We want that the text used in the tents produces more and more of a fictional self and a fictional voice.

The idea of addressing an object with one's voice is becoming less and less important and other questions are starting to dominate our discussions. How can the voicing of a text become performative for the reader him/herself? How far can one – consciously or technically - alienate one's voice? Which fictional selves are found, while searching for "one's own voice"? What is the potential of losing control over one's own voice?

We also would like to involve some playwrights and ask them to contribute parts of the texts in the continuation of the process.

At the moment we are communicating with potential partners for a production and premiere of "Voicing Pieces" in the first half of 2016.