Tanja Ostojic

Mis(s)placed Women?

2009-2022
A Collaborative Art Project

Teresa Albor   Nela Antonovic
Dagmara Bilon   Ines Borovac   Mia Bradic
Anais Clercx   Azad Coleman   Camilla Conocchi
Kathryn Fischer aka Mad Kate   Li Fu
Monika Janulevičiūtė   Karen Kipphoff
Branko Milisković
Sigrid Pawelke   Vanessa Ponte
Sabbii Senior   Alejandro Robles Sosa
Tanya Ury   Katja Vaghi   Bojana Videkanić
Arzu Yayintaş   Gülhatun Yildirim
among others.

Tanya Ostojic

Gaby Bila-Günther aka Lady Gaby
David Caines   Nati Canto   Hiuwai Chan
Nazli Durak
Selma Hekim
Susan Merrick
Tanja Ostojic
Balah Seki
Mare Tralla
Jiachen Xu

Hiuwai Chan
Exhibition participants:

Chapter 6: Workshops

Belgrade
Aberdeen
London
Berlin
Innsbruck

Doing Gender 8102 50.3*
Li Fu

Zurich
Split

Score #5: Speaking the Unspeakable
Tanja Ostojić

Istanbul
Mis(s)placed Women? — Istanbul Itinerary — A Review of the
Tanja Ostojić's Performance Art Workshop in the Public Spaces
Performistanbul

Workshop Reflection
Arzu Yayıntaş

Score #6: Catcalling Men
Arzu Yayıntaş

Feminist alliance building and practices of intimacy through
collaborative performance and textile work: Tanja Ostojić's
Mis(s)placed Women? workshop in Istanbul
Persefoni Myrtou

Upon a Blanket in the Square
Sabbı Senior

Chapter 7: Contributions During the Lockdown

Chapter 8: Inclusion

Artsis and Contributors
CHAPTER 1: UNPACKING A BAG OF YOUR OWN

Score #1: Unpacking a Bag of Your Own

TANJA OSTOJIĆ

About:
Misplaced Women? is an art project that welcomes contributions by people from diverse backgrounds that embody and enact everyday-life activities that touch upon forms of displacement. Participants are invited to perform and reflect upon different notions of travelling, identity, illegality, homelessness, security, private/public space, and to share their experiences on the project blog.

Instructions:
1. Select a migration-specific place that resonates with you (such as public transportation, central bus station, airport, border, areas affected by gentrification).
2. Get there and unpack a bag of your own (such as your own purse or backpack, or a bag with empty plastic bags, or packaging from consumer articles).
3. Take every single item out and turn it inside out. Take everything out of your pockets. Turn your pockets inside out. Take your shoes off. Once you’ve unpacked everything, search to see if you’ve discovered something else.
4. For those more advanced and highly motivated: You can repeat the same action in various places and times, and see how it is perceived by those around you. If you choose this option, draw on the map the places where you performed each unpacking performance.

Note:
Reflect upon how it felt to do this in public. Did you feel exposed? How did it resonate with your life experience, and did it bring you closer to the people on the move, people on the street, etc? Be open to talk to the passers-by about what you’re actually doing and why. Let this performance last for at least half an hour. If you have unpacked your things in a hectic way, after a break, try to pack items back with appreciation and care (or the other way around).

Attention:
Places that are generally understood as public spaces might appear not to be such. That means that with your performance you might challenge the notion of public space, and see where it is (not) possible to do your action. A security guy might push you one metre away from the entrance (in a shopping mall, or what many train stations have become nowadays, right?). A policeman might ask you, “What are you doing?”. I can only advise you to bring one person with you to try to talk to any security personnel you encounter, so that you can finish your performance. You may also say that you are searching for an item of your own that you really need but you are not sure if you took it with you (Whatever that might be, right?). This is to avoid being kicked out or arrested, given that performing and filming is usually not allowed in some “public” places.

Not allowed in some “public” places.

To avoid being kicked out or arrested, given that performing and filming is usually not allowed in some “public” places.

HYLA WILLIS

Misplaced Women?: Unpacking a Bag of Your Own

On the way from Pittsburgh to Zagreb, my luggage was misplaced for several days. I bought some PSI Conference T-shirts and a few other cheap things to wear in the complex of underground shops at the train station. I changed clothes, combed my hair, and repacked the old and new items in the backpack I had carried on board the plane. This was performed behind the train station, a place that seemed to host an entirely different demographic of people and businesses than the “front” of the station did. It gave me strange recollections of a very itinerant period in my childhood when a sturdty cardboard box for furniture or a bit of privacy for grooming were cherished luxuries. At the same time, I was fully aware of the Kunas in my pocket and the cosy hotel room I was sharing a few blocks away.

“Fury” is a delegated video-performance, as part of Tanja Ostojić’s project Misplaced Women?, about the loss of the Ury/Unger family archive with the collapse of the Historical Archives in Cologne, on March 3, 2009. It was filmed on October 3, 2009, German Reunification Day, the twentieth anniversary of the reunification. With “Fury” Tanya Ury takes on the role of one of the Three Furies, also known as the Erinnyes, or Eumenides, the so-called Avenging Goddesses of Antiquity who avenged extreme crimes and cruelties. She carries a suitcase full of scripts and articles written by her grandfather, Alfred H. Unger, which had been mistakenly delivered to her home address and not the City Archives ten years previously, and which she had kept. At the “hole”, the location where the Cologne City Archives once stood, she reads one of these articles about Cologne, from 1948.

“Fury” video-performance, 2009, 2 hours 05 min video, Historical City Archives, Cologne, Germany.

TANYA URY

Fury

“Fury” is a delegated video-performance, as part of Tanja Ostojić’s project Misplaced Women?, about the loss of the Ury/Unger family archive with the collapse of the Historical Archives in Cologne, on March 3, 2009. It was filmed on October 3, 2009, German Reunification Day, the twentieth anniversary of the reunification. With “Fury” Tanya Ury takes on the role of one of the Three Furies, also known as the Erinnyes, or Eumenides, the so-called Avenging Goddesses of Antiquity who avenged extreme crimes and cruelties. She carries a suitcase full of scripts and articles written by her grandfather, Alfred H. Unger, which had been mistakenly delivered to her home address and not the City Archives ten years previously, and which she had kept. At the “hole”, the location where the Cologne City Archives once stood, she reads one of these articles about Cologne, from 1948.

“Fury” video-performance, 2009, 2 hours 05 min video, Historical City Archives, Cologne, Germany.

[Source: Misplaced Women? blog, 2009]
CHAPTER 1: UNPACKING A BAG OF YOUR OWN

TANJA OSTOJIĆ
Misplaced Women?: Unpacking a Bag of Your Own

I landed in Bergen's well of mist and fog, after a connecting flight from Berlin over Copenhagen. The purpose of my visit here was to take part in the “Migration, Globalisation, and New Social Formations” conference by the Bergen International Migration and Ethnic Relations Research Unit.

On Tuesday November 8, 2011, starting at 1:40pm I performed my Misplaced Women? score at the arrivals and departures terminal of Bergen’s international airport. In approximately 30 minutes I took out the entire contents of my two suitcases, my handbag, as well as my cosmetics and make-up bags. I took out each single item one by one, turning them inside out, and placing them all on the floor of the terminal, on a red SAS blanket that I had borrowed from the aeroplane a couple of minutes earlier. A Bergen airport security guy let me finish my performance, and then he asked if I needed any help. I said “No”.

- “So, what are you doing here?” he asked.
- “I’m looking for something that I need for my presentation at the University on Thursday. I hope I did not forget it” was my answer, while I continued to take out every single item from my cosmetics bag which I turned inside out, as well as all my tights, socks, underwear, pullovers....

Tanja Ostojić, written contribution published on the Misplaced Women? project blog, 2011.

CHAPTER 1: UNPACKING A BAG OF YOUR OWN

TANJA OSTOJIĆ
Misplaced Women? Dedicated to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada

When I arrive at Dundas and McCaul Street, a crowd has already gathered, creating a semi circle around a woman who was holding a sign, on which “MISPLACED WOMEN?” was hand-written... Meanwhile, I scan the area looking for Tanja Ostojić. I had met her before and so I know that she is not the woman holding the sign...

Eventually Ostojić exits the glass cubicle of the bus stop nearby, rolling a suitcase behind her, and positions herself between us and the “MISPLACED WOMEN?” performer. She... begins to empty her pockets, then her bag, then the bags contained in her bag, until all of the contents, reduced to their smallest parts, litter the ground... The last item she removes is a large black garbage bag. She explores this object more curiously than the rest, eventually stepping into it, crouching and pulling it over her body. It fits. She then steps into the suitcase... She pulls the suitcase flap closed. She squirms, reaches out an arm and struggles to close the zipper. An audience member steps in to help. Seemingly concerned, an elderly man hovers around while Ostojić is stuffed in her suitcase, which has now been transformed into a tomb. I notice her body relax.

To me, this part of the action, a pause of sorts, is the most evocative, striking and difficult moment in the work. As black plastic gently rustles over Ostojić's contorted limbs, I think about the people whose bodies are found like this, in suitcases and in garbage bags: Guang Hua Liu, Melonie Biddersingh, Lin Jun, Tina Fontaine, and countless others who I am sure exist, but who I either can't recall or do not know about. Most of these bodies are women, most of these women are Indigenous or racially marginalised.

Michelle Lacombe, from the review first published on 7*11fd blog

TANJA OSTOJIĆ
Misplaced Women?: Unpacking a Bag of Your Own

1. It is normal for me to have my bags searched. I am always being searched in Belfast when I go to the shops.

2. The only time I went to Moscow was in 1986, when I was twenty years old. When they wanted to check inside one of my bags I said “No!” and to my surprise, they didn’t. It contained seven kilograms of all types of Kenyan fruits wrapped in newspaper. The bag was a basket made of natural fibres and was sewn together with string. I took the fruit back to my family in Northern Ireland.

3. In 2006 my seven-year-old daughter was forced to bin her toy snake at Sydney airport, just in case someone overreacted to it on the plane in the same way that the woman who was checking the bag had hysterically overreacted! The child did not allow herself to cry. But she also has not forgotten.


TANJA OSTOJIĆ
A Pink River

The International Women’s Day contribution by Tan Tan is a story (as she says) about a “misplaced woman” who comes from China and currently lives in Belgium, who attempts to find her place as a foreign woman despite all the stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings. (Tanja Ostojić)

I’m a woman
Made in China
But I’m not cheap
I’m a woman
I like shopping
But I’m not a commodity
I’m a woman
I work like a man
But I don’t get the same
I’m a woman
I sleep with a man
But I deserve a place of my own


Tan Tan, from the written contribution published on the Misplaced Women? project blog, 2018.
CHAPTER 2: HOLDING THE “MISPLACED WOMEN?” SIGN

TANJA OSTOJIĆ

Score #2: Holding the “Misplaced Women?” Sign

Less than an hour, with/without preparations, one performer

Instructions:
1. Select a migration-specific place that resonates with you.
2. Make your own “MISPLACED WOMEN?” (or “MISPLACED MAN?”) sign or banner (on a cardboard, on a piece of paper, on some cloth. It can be a drawing or an embroidery, a collage, a drawing).
3. Stand there and hold it for at least half an hour.
4. Ask someone to take a photo of you standing there.
5. You can repeat the same action in various places and times, and see how it is being perceived by those around you. If you choose this option, draw on the map the places where you performed each action.

Note:
Reflect upon how it felt to hold the sign, how it resonated with you, with your life experience, how the location you chose affected you. Be open to talk to the people that are passing by about the sign you are holding and related issues, and hear what they have to say about it.

Crediting and Publishing:
It is important to credit everyone properly. With the Mis(s)placed Women? project we pay special attention to that. Please be sure to fully credit your action as: (your name) Mis(s)placed Women? delegated performance by Tanja Ostojić, whenever you publish it. We will do the same with your contribution. Send a photo or a drawing asked for this project (preferably, a short description about how it went (include your name, date, time, duration, location(s) name(s) of everyone involved, photographer and notes). Please let us know if you would like your contribution to be published on the project’s blog. We would greatly appreciate your permission to do so.


Missing Women: Some Thoughts As to Why I Became Missing While Waiting for Tanja Ostojić

Contribution by Bojana Videkanić

Last year, I invited Tanja Ostojić to present her work at the 7A*11D International Festival of Performance in Toronto. She generously accepted and came in October 2016. In our conversations prior to her arrival, she asked me about a “Misplaced (Men/?)” sign and hold it while waiting for her at the Pearson International Airport. I was happy to do this, made the sign, and decided to include a question mark at the end.

While standing there at the international arrivals gate, I had some time to reflect on the action I was performing (standing in the middle of the great airport hall with an ambiguous sign in my hands) and what its ramifications might be. First, I realized that I was initiating Tanja’s performance, as it became obvious that my interactions with the accidental audiences were catalysts for a discussion around national borders and the policing of bodies. Secondly, I realized the echoes of her work in our “local” Canadian context, in relation to the missing and murdered indigenous women, as well as the impact it had in light of the Syrian crisis and the inability of global leaders to see the refugees as human beings. What I did not expect was my own physical reaction to the sign and the moment I found myself missing it.

It became obvious at that moment that the sign “Missing Women” was not about some other missing women (although of course it is about many thousands if not millions of them) but that it was also about my own experiences with borders and their violence. It brought me some twenty years back to 1992, and my fifteen-year-old self, a confused, frightened child who, in a matter of a few weeks between April 6 and April 20, 1992, became a refugee. At the time I did not know what that meant, but I learned quickly. When my hometown of Sarajevo came under siege and the first grenades fell, my desperate, naive parents wanted to save me, to protect me, so they found a way to put me on one of the last planes leaving the city to go to Belgrade and then on to London. I will never forget the scene of desperation at the Sarajevo Airport as hundreds and hundreds of people gathered to try to get their small children, parents, and other family members onto the Kikash military planes. They were all pleading with important-looking military officers, with their long lists of names, to let them through—crying, begging, consoling. Through some miracle, my parents managed to get me on one of those lists and on one of the planes. They gave me a few of our family photos (so that I would not forget them and where I come from), and my mom lovingly packed my sinus medication and some clothes. She told me that I would be back at the end of the summer when the war was over, and with my English much improved. And so I went, with my grey, Yugoslav child passport (which in fact was no longer valid, as we were living through the breakup of the country), 500 deutsche marks, my photos, and a book. As the Kikash plane lifted off (in fact, this was my very first time being on a plane) I sat on the floor of its enormous belly with a couple of hundred other people, not really knowing where I was going and what will happen to me when I get there. I was all alone, a child who had never travelled without her parents, en route to some unknown future.

Three days later I was on a plane ride to London with another boy, a son of my parents’ friends. The two of us were going to his aunt’s house; she had agreed to take me in for a short period until I was to return home to Sarajevo. We landed and I was immediately detained by the UK customs and immigration. I was held in an interrogation room for six hours. I had to take all my clothes out of my bag, they took my family photos and asked me about each person in the photo and where they were, they asked me about my sinus medication, about how much clothes I had, and why I was traveling, do I know what is happening to my country? They even asked me about Ernest Hemingway’s For Whom the Bell Tolls, the one book that I had managed to take out of my parents’ library as I was leaving (the book I cannot bring myself to read again). It is hard to describe that feeling of helplessness, of being at the mercy of people in uniform, and especially being that way as a child. Like a caged animal, my heart pounded, I was shaking, and I cried. I cried, knowing that all those things that the immigration officers were looking through were really the last things that I could say were mine, these were the last remnants of my family life, and of my country, even those darn sinus pills… My entire life on display, my entire life in one suitcase, now an object of conversation for immigration officers, and evidence of my status.

Finally, I was let through—they decided that my friend’s aunt who was waiting for us was credible. This was my initiation into the life of a refugee. From that moment on, I moved with my suitcase from family to family, twice in London (during...
the two-month stay there), and some ten times later on when I lived as a refugee in Croatia. At one point while still in London, I was supposed to be moved for the third time, but when that did not work out the people with whom I was staying decided that I should be given over to Child Services (as having a fifteen-year-old girl in the house was too much for them). I couch-surfed most of the time, slept in peoples’ baby rooms next to their kids’ cribs, in their master bedrooms on the floor; in spare rooms, living rooms, all kinds of rooms. I learned to hold my pee in so that I would not have to go to the bathroom while the owners of the house were around. I learned to take fast showers, I learned to eat when no one was looking (usually late at night). I learned how to walk without making a sound, how to use a hand towel, soap, shampoo, or kitchen utensils so that they would look like no one had used them. I learned to be sparing with creams, food, cookies so that it would not look like someone had eaten them. I learned to be invisible, to not be noticed by police, by men, by security. I learned how to pack my bag quickly so that I could move out fast. I learned that refugees are never welcome, that we are perceived as a burden, not just to the state and all its mechanisms, but often to extended families, friends, and even do-gooders who think that they can take refugees into their homes but cannot deal with someone actually living with them, taking up their space.

However, I also met some amazing people on the way, selfless, caring people like my mom’s friend who took me and my family in with her son for four months. Or like a doctor from Doctors Without Borders who I met on the street—I told him during the course of our conversation that my parents were doctors in Sarajevo, and that I was not sure if they were dead or alive as all the phone lines were down, and I had not spoken to them in two months. He told me that he would find my parents, as he was going back to Sarajevo, and promised to deliver my letter to them. And he did! (That was how my parents found out I was alive and well).

In the end, I also learned that my parents were broken by the war. The strong, independent people I knew before April 1992 were doctors in Sarajevo, and that I was not sure if they were speaking the truth or not; they were doctors in Sarajevo, and that I was not sure if they were dead or alive as all the phone lines were down, and I had not spoken to them in two months. He told me that he would find my parents, as he was going back to Sarajevo, and promised to deliver my letter to them. And he did! (That was how my parents found out I was alive and well).

When both my parents came out of the besieged Sarajevo war. The strong, independent people I knew before April 1992 in the end, I also learned that my parents were broken by the parents found out I was alive and well). Which was never dealt with. The defeat only continued when we came to Canada, when my parents had difficulty learning English, were not able to find a job, and found themselves in limbo, being too old to go to school in their early-to-mid-fifties but also too young to retire. My father would go to a local Food Bank to get food, and toll at a construction site as a construction worker; my mom worked with developmentally disabled adults and was often attacked and bitten by them. Yes, standing there at the arrivals gate at Pearson Airport became an embodied performance of myself missing and my parents missing. I was that fifteen-year-old kid again, trying to find myself.

Many confused passers-by approached me to inquire about what I was doing, including a female security guard. “You know you will get a lot of people asking about the sign,” she said. “They will think you have some answers for them.” Then she added, “You know, I am misplaced too….” These interactions opened up a whole new conversation about the invisibility and visibility of women who are marginalised, who are placed at the mercy of governmental mechanisms, police, immigration, welfare and unemployment services, ministry of Indigenous affairs, lawyers, immigration courts.

I write this as the Syrian refugees are fleeing their country, just like I did over twenty years ago. I write this as Trump has barred people from entering the United States, I write this as frozen refugee claimants are crossing the US/Canada border at negative forty degrees Celsius, I write this as an official inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women is only just taking place over forty years after their deaths, I write this as hundreds of unaccompanied minors are prevented from entering the UK (as the government stopped its program to help them), I write this as women and children are still going missing—no questions asked. Tanja Ostojić’s performance, which dares to ask that question, is therefore more important than ever. Standing in the crowd with a sign “Missing Women?” at this moment becomes an ethical and moral confrontation. And at a time of “alternative” truths, the truth of those who are marginalised is the one that matters.


Dagmara Bilon


“Score #1: Becoming One With a Bag”, 2021

CHAPTER 3: BECOMING ONE WITH A BAG

DAGMARA BILON

Score #3: Becoming One With a Bag

Around 30 minutes, with or without preparation, two performers

Location: busy city bridge

About: This score is a sort of combination of the Misplaced Women? “Score #1” and “Score #2” by Tanja Ostojić. “Becoming One With a Bag” is a metaphor for displacement, objectification, and detachment from humanity, in which the viewer on their way to work crosses the busy city bridge and unexpectedly spots legs coming out of a bag, without a face, without an identity. Next to the bag on legs, there is a second person (co-performer) holding a “MISPLACED WOMEN?” sign (“Score #2”). The bridge here becomes a symbol of a transient state, in between two different locations, a site of migration, movement, and ambivalence.

Instructions: 1. Select a busy city bridge.

2. The main action takes place on the pedestrian area toward the middle of the bridge.

3. The performer wears a dress and high heels, and walks over the bridge toward the middle, carrying the “refuge bag” on her shoulder. She stops and steps inside the bag until her upper body disappears inside the bag. The second performer zips the bag and positions herself approximately one metre away.

4. Both of them stand still as a kind of juxtaposed, obscure attraction and provocation at the same time for about half an hour.

Important: The co-performer needs also to look after the person in the bag who cannot see her surroundings.

Note: It is interesting to find out who this action speaks to and how the people passing by on the bridge respond to it. Reflect on your motivation to perform this score and from which perspective you speak. (For example, as a non-UK citizen based in London, I travelled recently back home to unite with my family after having been away for two weeks. Two days ahead of my flight, I received an email from the Home Office stating that if I am not able to present my Settled Status at the border, I won’t be able to enter the country. After 20 years of living in the UK, I would have never thought that I had to fear being stopped at the borders. This experience made me think about the people who struggle daily with this issue.)

Crediting and Publishing: Misplaced Women? project by Tanja Ostojić, live action by Dagmara Bilon, performed by: your names...

“Score #1: Becoming One With a Bag”, 2021
CHAPTER 4: SPREAD AND REFLECT

HOANG TRAN HIEU HANH

Score #4: Spread and Reflect

More or less than an hour, several performers

About:
“Mirror, Mirror – Spread Your Reflection!” is a collaborative intervention with large mirrors, first performed in Berlin’s underground in January 2018 within the framework of Tanja Ostojić’s Misplaced Women? performance art workshop. The score deriving from it is focused on the phenomenon of manspreading, or men’s habit of sitting in public transport with legs wide apart, thereby covering more than their own seat.

Instructions:
1. Choose a mirror to bring along with you (the larger the better).
2. Select the means of transport you prefer, for example: metro, tram, train.
3. Take your seat in front of a cis man (short for cisgender man: a person who was assigned male at birth and whose gender identity is male).
4. Hold your mirror between your legs with the mirror reflection towards the person sitting opposite to you.
5. You can repeat the same action in a different means of transport and see how different it is being perceived every time.

Note:
Reflect upon how it feels to hold the mirror, to take up the space, to be made invisible by the mirror, and to become visible with the mirror.

Crediting and Publishing:
It is very important to credit everyone properly. In the Misplaced Women? project we pay special attention to that. Please be sure to fully credit your action as: (Your name:) a performance in response to the delegated performance by Hoang Tran Hieu Hanh, “Score 4: Spread and Reflect”, Misplaced Women?, project by Tanja Ostojić, performed by: add names of everyone performing with you and the photographer(s) name(s)— wherever you share it or print it, and we will do the same with your contribution. Send a photo or a drawing of yourself performing, the description about how it went (your name, date, time, duration, location(s) and notes about what happened). Please let us know if you would like your contribution to be published on the blog of the project. We would greatly appreciate that!

“Score #4: Spread and Reflect”, 2021.

CHAPTER 5: MISPLACED WOMEN? AND THE TOURIST SUITCASE

TANJA OSTOJIĆ

“Misplaced Women?” and the Tourist Suitcase

After winning an international competition for my performance art project Art in Public Space Tyrol, I published an open call for a three-day-long Misplaced Women? performance workshop in which I produced a total of six new performances and site-specific interventions across Innsbruck with three participants, myself included. The process and the results of the workshop were presented on May 13, 2018, in Die Bäckerei. For the realisation of each of the performances we have chosen a specific location and context. I performed “Misplaced Women? and the Tourist Suitcase”, for the very first time, as a 30 minute performance at the place that was considered the most unwelcoming and dangerous in the city: Innsbruck train station. During the performance, I went through transformations, from a business woman, to a tourist, and finally, to a homeless woman, using as my props hats, caps, a disposable camera, sunglasses, different clothes, fruit yoghurt, sun cream, and miscellaneous items that I took out of one oversized suitcase that had many stickers on it, such as: Hawaii, Aloha, Jamaica, Holland, Norway, Praha. It was given to me by my son’s grandparents, pensioners based in Innsbruck, who travelled to these places, and who had previously fled, in 1969, as refugees from Czechoslovakia, via Yugoslavia, to Austria. The performance attracted a lot of attention at the very busy platform in front of the main entrance of the train station. The reactions of the audience were fascinating—they quite literally took care of me throughout the performance. People came to check if I was okay, to help me lock myself inside the suitcase, to unzip the suitcase and let me out... Two girls patiently and carefully tried to pull out my hair that was stuck in the zipper of the suitcase.

The next day, I performed the 60-minute-long performance “Misplaced Women? and the Tourist Suitcase” in a slightly different form, using identical props as the previous day, going through transformations, this time from a businesswoman, to a tourist, to a homeless woman, to an immigrant, in the most popular location in the city, on the square in front of the famous Golden Roof, downtown in the heart of the historical centre. At this location, the performance was received quite differently, because the passers-by that use this public space are also different. It turned out that the performance was very well received among many tourists from Korea and India, who were pleased to chat with the suitcase that walked around on its feet wearing flip flops, and was sometimes gently nudging the crowd. They recorded the performance and posted it on social media. Coincidentally, the performance took place at the same location as the FPÖ (Austria’s xenophobic right-wing party). Two church activists scolded me, and one of them slapped me on the face with religious propaganda material, throwing flyers at me, I suppose asking me to re-educate myself.

A stout FPÖ female security guard, dressed in a dirndl, a traditional Austrian outfit, and carrying a wooden barrel full of brandy on her belt, pushed me off the scene after a while because she no longer wanted to tolerate a walking suitcase that gently pushed her party fellows and musicians who were getting ready to play at that gathering. I later learned that my performance assistant was also threatened with the police if she didn’t collect the “garbage” created during the performance. Of course we intended to clean up our materials at the end, when all the things I originally took out of the suitcase while performing would be placed back.
In the photos: Marija Jevtić, Tanja Ostojić, Sunčica Šido, Nela Antonović and Nazer, Balkan route 2015.

...To me, Misplaced Women? is a very peculiar performance. It has many meanings linked to my academic interests and to my individual experience. It recalls the everyday reality of migrants and refugees, of people who more or less willingly move between countries and cities. Their personal stories happen every day on the streets, in shops, at bus stations, and airports... The idea is that anyone can enact the performance in ordinary settings, among strangers passing by; just like anyone can become a migrant who needs to pack a part of their life into a suitcase and move to an unknown place. Misplaced Women? does not ask about nationality or political status. It performs and reaffirms the right of individual people to exist and to occupy space as human beings, whatever their identity is. It calls attention to their presence, to their present existence, an existence often unrecognised or denied by political and national modes of identification (especially in the case of the undocumented). MW lets individuals be present without asking about their place of belonging...
“The things we leave behind” is a research-based project begun in 2015 that uses objects left behind by those who are seeking a better life and/or must continue moving to survive. Ever since the Misplaced Women? workshop in London in December 2016, the Mis(s)placed Women? “Score #1” has become one of the ways to frame the work—given that the conceptual underpinnings of the two projects are the same. The initial objects used in the project were left behind on the Greek island of Lesvos and at a transition centre in Serbia by people leaving Syria and Afghanistan. They have been “borrowed” by people living in London, used to start conversations with young people in installations and as part of performances. A limited-edition zine has been produced with images and writing that emerged from the project. Many of the objects were contributed by an organization called the Dirty Girls of Lesvos Island, which collects, cleans, and redistributes clothes and blankets to those in need. Proceeds from this project have been donated to this organisation. Over the last four years, the project has evolved to focus on climate migration particularly in Bangladesh.

“Misplaced Women?”, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2021, video, 4 min 29 sec

This video mirrors the core premise of the Mis(s)placed Women? Project: “...to enact everyday life that signifies displacement... and [consider] relations of power and vulnerability”. In this case, the focus is the displacement of women who internally migrate due to the climate catastrophe. Climate change is taking a toll on Bangladesh, most of which is in the low-lying, densely populated delta of south Asia’s major river systems. Hundreds of hectares erode annually rendering thousands of people homeless. According to the Environmental Justice Foundation, one in seven people here will be displaced due to rising sea levels by 2050. The video is composed of images by a Bangladeshi photographer who has been documenting climate migration (K M Asad), a Bengali voiceover (Taiara Farhana Tareque) based on interviews with climate migrant women, juxtaposed with footage of a live performance in Dhaka, and at a transition centre in Serbia, by people leaving Syria and Afghanistan. This performance involved unpacking a woven plastic bag, often used by people moving to survive. Ever since the Misplaced Women? workshop in London in December 2016, the Mis(s)placed Women? “Score #1” has become one of the ways to frame the work—given that the conceptual underpinnings of the two projects are the same. The initial objects used in the project were left behind on the Greek island of Lesvos and at a transition centre in Serbia by people leaving Syria and Afghanistan, was opened and the contents gently placed on a table outside a theatre in East London. One item was a fragile necklace which was hopelessly tangled. The performance involved the unpacking and the unsuccessful attempt to sort out the necklace.

“Misplaced Women?”, Hackney Wick, London, 2016, video 2 min 39 sec

Rather than unpack a personal bag, in this case a suitcase full of objects left behind on the Greek island of Lesvos and at a transition centre in Serbia, by people leaving Syria and Afghanistan, was opened and the contents gently placed on a table outside a theatre in East London. One item was a fragile necklace which was hopelessly tangled. The performance involved the unpacking and the unsuccessful attempt to sort out the necklace.


This performance involved unpacking a woven plastic bag, often used by people who are migrating, in the largest shopping mall in London. Like the previous performances, the objects in the bag were left behind on the Greek island of Lesvos and at a transition centre in Serbia, by people leaving Syria and Afghanistan. A sound piece was played from a mobile phone—a recitation of the names of some of those who are missing or died during their journey. As it was less than ten days before Christmas, the bag also contained gift wrap and ribbons, a nod to the many people who were at the shopping mall, purchasing new objects to give as gifts to family and friends. A private security guard respectfully monitored the performance and was asked (as overheard on his walkie talkie) to let it proceed as long as there was no attempt to promote a product.
...it made me think a lot about how my gender is already "quizzed" as an independent, migrating body... and makes me stand out from other cunt-bearing bodies—"wymyn"—even within my own US-American culture, who face strict gender expectations of their femininity and heteronormativity. The female migrating body already has a relative independence compared to women who are limited by their own communities in terms of freedom of movement. *The word wymyn is purposely "genderf*cked to disentangle the word "man" from the word "woman", and with the intention of being inclusive to trans women, non-binary, intersex, and other genderqueer people. The migrating body already has access to the privilege of movement, even when they encounter borders, even when that movement is made illegal.

As a response to this question I decided to dress up all in purple (as a ritual and a symbol of the womb) and take the large purple suitcase my mother had given me, and walk into the park. I decorated a large purple hat with photographs of the women who used to live within close proximity to me, whom I moved far away from fourteen years previously, when I left the United States. I know that some of the women on that hat have never had the privilege of leaving the country. I have thought of many of them as the women I write to in "letters back home", telling them of my challenges and adventures moving away on my own.

Kathryn Fischer aka Mad Kate, from the written contribution published on the Misplaced Women? project blog, 2018.

I am a body and I am a statement.
I am a witness and I am evidence of manipulation.
I don't want to ask for permission to be.
I am a body and I am a statement.
I am a witness and I am evidence of manipulation.
I don't want to ask for permission to be.
I don't want to be defined by you, or anybody, or anywhere, or anything.
I don't want to be from here or there.
If my existence threatens you, that is because you are afraid to lose your privileges.
If your walls surround me, my words will be the weapon to make them fall.

If you hurt me, I will heal.
And I will repeat this all over again.
Because I have a pact with all of my kind.
Because that's my duty and my only way to resist.

Luciana Damiani, from the written contribution published on the Misplaced Women? project blog, 2019.

The space was divided into two areas: the fictional private back area with a glass ceiling that provided a view of the library, a window front that was converted into a mirror, and seating that framed and thus delimited the "private area", but could at the same time be used as a place of interaction with the outside and the public area at the front, where a long, dark grey metal grid was converted into a catwalk. On the threshold between the public and private spaces, a feature (symbolically represented by nail polish) is removed, like a painful act of liberation from the predefined categories of gender. The nail polish lies on the body like a second skin and can only be gradually removed with repetitive movements and external aid (nail polish remover). In the private sphere, items from the suitcase are then used purposefully to represent "masculinity". Gestures are practised in the mirror and specific items of clothing and accessories help the construction. "Masculinity" is enacted by exaggerated "typical" ways of behaving (acting aggressively in social space, carelessly knocking over the garbage bin) as well as with posture, walking style, facial expressions, and gestures. This socially anchored behaviour that is carried out in the virtual or actual presence of others we assume are habituated to it makes the elements that construct gender visible.

In the private sphere the subject now deals with what has just been produced, layer by layer, and practices "silence imposed by masculinity".

The subject is then offered an alternative action and attribution from outside, through performance assistant Pippa Chace. This is done using socially recognisable images, which also inspire a certain sense of belonging and solidarity.

A "woman/girlfriend" paints the nails for another "woman/girlfriend" and selects a "suitable" piece of clothing for her from the suitcase. The "woman" shaves her legs and applies lotion. The performative act is carried out layer by layer. The construction of “femininity” appears distorted in the mirror image. This is the staging of "femininity".

In the private sphere, the subject now deals with what has just been produced, layer by layer, and practices “female outletness” crying loudly and lamenting “hyppercally”. Who am I?” echoes in the private space of the performance.

Layer by layer an “in-between” is constructed and raises its voice in public space for the first time.

“It is not a HE. It is not a SHE. There also exists an ‘in-between’ Those who are not willing to admit it can just go to hell. I’m not bothered by the lack of empathy, but rather, by transphobia that prevails in so many countries.”

Preparation phase: about an hour the evening before.

Bibliography

About the person: a case of a distorted LI Fu is interested in the politics of everyday life and social development in terms of everyday life and the consideration of the building blocks which are used to construct realities. With various performances, the artist makes GLH-like attempts to transfer theoretical concepts into everyday life.

Edited and first published in German by Tanja Ostojić on the Misplaced Women? blog 2017/18. This Performance has been released in the Framework of the Misplaced Women? workshop by Tanja Ostojić in the course of Art of Public Space from May 2018 in Innsbruck, Austria.
On Rape Attempts is a 20-minute performance by Tanja Ostojić at the Peristil, the heart of the historical centre, where the emperor once addressed his subjects. Ostojić performed a testimony regarding four rape attempts that she experienced 25-30 years earlier, and gave an empowering speech with the tips on how to fight back if sexually assaulted, based on her own experience. At the same time, two young artists were performing along. Using improvised movements, Mia Bradić was embodying Ostojić’s testimony, while Alejandra Robles Sosa was translating it into embroidery. At the end, Ostojić opened the podium inviting other women who gathered there to give testimonies as well.

(Source: MIA/Placed Women? video channel)

Around 20 minutes or longer, with or without preparation, three or more participants
Location: A public space where one can feel protected

About: This score is derived from my performance “On Rape Attempts” (Split, 2021) in which I described four cases of fighting back/escaping from rape attempts. The performance had an empowering effect on me, so I created this score as an invitation to others who have been exposed to sexual harassment or sexual violence*, or have witnessed others in such a situation, to share their personal experiences in a safe circle or in a public space. It is important to share these stories if you feel that it will be an empowering experience for you and others around you, and a part of your healing process. You need to be in control of whether to share and how to share your experience as a survivor. You can choose in what circumstances and at what level of detail you feel comfortable talking about it. Ultimately, what matters most is what has value and meaning for you.

Instructions:
1. Select a location in a public space where you can feel safe and protected (by architecture, greenery, and by a crowd that would gather to support you). You can position yourself on an (imaginary) stage or in a safe circle that you draw on the ground.
2. Describe the situations in which you were sexually harassed. You may start with possible abuse you faced in your childhood or by telling stories that affected you the most in your life.
3. You can instruct two of your friends to co-perform. While you are talking, one of them can try to translate your words into improvised bodily movements and the other perhaps into embroidery or another artistic medium.
4. As you tell your story, in your own way you may try to explain how you tried to escape or fight back, what happened after the attack(s), your emotions during and after, and what kind of support you received or would have liked to have received.
5. Let your friends give you a healing hug when you finish.
6. You can also choose to shake out the stress from your body.
7. You may invite other women present, both participants and viewers, to take your place and to tell their stories as well.

Notes:
If you feel anxious, you may postpone and/or perform this score in the safety of a community centre or in a private space. Take your time to drink tea and talk with everyone there to support you after it is completed. Do not forget that speaking publicly has legal implications. Remember that there are ways to share your story while remaining anonymous. If you name the offender publicly or talk about a criminal act, you may need to consider getting a legal consultation to navigate the legal implications of your public testimony.

*Attention: Please be aware that this score cannot be used as a tool for sexual violence survivors without supervision of a specialised social worker. Perhaps you may use it to speak of gender-based discrimination instead.

Tanja Ostojić: “Score #5: Speaking the Unspeakable”, 2022.
CHAPTER 6: WORKSHOPS | ISTANBUL

Mis(s)placed Women? — Istanbul Itinerary — A Review of the Tanja Ostojić’s Performance Art Workshop in the Public Spaces

By Performistanbul

Do you know the powerful and satisfying feeling you have after protesting in a public space and collectively claiming your rights out loud? This is how Tanja Ostojić’s workshop made us all feel. We were re-discovering the strength of gathering and expressing ourselves through our bodies and our words, as well as reclaiming the power of public spaces through the unique, fluid, and non-conformist practice of performance art.

From beginning to end, this project has been a great but rewarding challenge not only for the participants but also for the coordination and documentation team. How can you coordinate a group of women and queer people moving and performing freely in the streets in a country and culture that prohibits social gatherings and public protests? How do you document a series of public performances as they are created and developed organically in the moment?

The Open Call

The journey started with an open call. Participants of all backgrounds and genders that could commit to participate for the entire duration of the workshop were invited to apply. After we received around forty applications, along with Performistanbul’s team (Simge Burhanoğlu, Azra İşmen, Ayda Bayram), Tanja Ostojić meticulously analysed each application to the workshop, the artist and the participants gathered in the garden of Performistanbul’s building, which is situated in Galata, one of the oldest neighbourhoods of Istanbul. The purpose of the first meeting was for the participants to get to know each other and discover each other’s unique paths in life. Ostojić started by creating a human circle before getting to the exercises. During the session, they all raised their voices, moved their bodies, discussed the endless definitions of performance art, their personal backgrounds, the reasons why they applied to be a part of this experience, and the relationships they had to public spaces. Before getting to the creative and artistic part, Ostojić was already setting the tone of the workshop: the whole experience was about freeing the mind, voice, and body while developing our team and the documentation crew, started their walk towards İstiklal (Independence) Street. It was September 7, marking the anniversary of the anti-Greek pogroms, a series of state-sponsored mob attacks directed primarily at Istanbul’s Greek minority on September 6–7, 1955. The dark memory of the historical event affected the spirit of the first collective performance. While walking through the street of Bostan, where the old German High School is located, all the participants started walking backwards, inspired by and referring to Gülhatun Yıldırım’s (one of the participants) performance “Just Like the Past” (İstiklal Street, public video performance, 2015). Sharing one action among a group had a striking and unifying effect on both the group’s members and its spectators.

As the group reached İstiklal Street, a symbolic space for social movements, female and queer bodies walking backwards suddenly became an act of protest, given that it has been forbidden to gather and demonstrate in İstiklal Street since the Gezi Protests (2013).

Arzu Yayıntaş, one of the participants, grabbed her silk scarf and started waving it with the wind. Other participants followed her by using their own scarves, or borrowed some from Persefoni Myrtou, who had brought her grandmother’s unused dowry to share with others during the whole workshop as performance props. When they arrived at the Istanbul Bar Association Building and stood in front of the banner that read in Turkish, “The Istanbul Convention saves lives,” all the participants stopped and continued waving their beautiful, colourful fabrics. These scarves became like flags that expressed the group’s disapproval of Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. They created a kind of “tableau vivant” that drew the attention of the public. Some of the crowd just stopped to contemplate the group and some of them started imitating their reverse walk. This is when we had to face the first police interruption and our first warning. After three distinct patrols checked all the papers and filming permits that we had, and then two other patrols interrupted the walk, we were informed that we could not walk and film through İstiklal Street and that we could only continue our “activities and actions” in the backstreets. As Performistanbul team, our main role was to constantly deal with the authorities, so that the performance and documentation process were the least affected. It has been made quite clear that we need to re-think our relationship to public spaces and the rights that we have to make use of them. What is a public space? What isn’t allowed in a public space? Which groups are tolerated to gather in public spaces? Those questions would keep repeating in our minds till the end of the workshop process.

This is how the whole group decided to settle and occupy a space in a traditional street “tea house,” located in Mis Street and mostly populated by men. The group started exploring Persefoni’s space and spreading it around the space. Each participant selected a piece and rearranging it with the remainder while Myrtou was preparing Turkish coffee for fortune telling. The performance established a safe bubble, transforming the space into a place dedicated to womanhood as well as queer-hood. The female presence and aesthetics took over the place. Some
of the passersby took a break and watched the amusing and meditative scene created by the group and asked questions about what was happening. That was the end of the first day.

Wednesday, September 8, 2021-Nişantaşı

On the second day of the workshop, all the participants gathered in front of the Teyyikye Mosque. The first meeting to plan the day was made in the Mosque's garden. After a conversation about what happened the previous day, Ostojić and the participants started discussing the progression of the day, making different propositions and already setting a frame for the upcoming performances. “To be present for the other, listening and communicating. Unity, trust, empowerment, devotion, sincerity” were the main keywords that led the workshop.

The group selected the square in Kadırgalar street, a posh street of Istanbul surrounded by luxury brands and cafes, to serve as their performance space for the day. Before reaching the square, Arzu Yaçıntaş made a proposition for the first collective performance: to randomly complement and call attention to others that came across during the walk. Selma Hekim contributed to this performative piece with the uncommon sound of her traditional erbane/daf, an instrument only passing by and playing of the erbane.

Nazli Durak, Gizem Yılmaz, Vanessa Ponte, Arzu Yaçıntaş, Selma Hekim and Persenfo Myrtsou started performing simultaneously. Some of the individual performances connected with each other, creating a collective performance, while others drifted apart and performed alone. Persenfo Myrtsou performed while being blindfolded, the Mis(s)placed Women? project “Score #1: Unpacking a Bag of Your Own” that included unpacking and repacking of a bag in the public space. The rest of the group started unpacking and interacting with their props and each other. Arzu Yaçıntaş explored objects associated with womanhood by society. Combining many clothing objects and wearing them in an unusual way while incorporating yoga poses and moving her body in a displeasing, eccentric way in opposition to what is expected from womanhood. Meantime, Vanessa Ponte and Gizem Yılmaz were displaying beautifying actions such as putting on makeup and dressing up in the most absurd ways—an absurdity they accentuated through repetitive movements. Next to this duo, Nazli Durak explored Yaçıntaş’ props. By dressing herself up with princess costumes for children, she tried to fit in with society with each step of the unexpected behaviour. During the whole session Selma Hekim accompanied the group by playing erbane.

After the lunch break, the next stop was the Teyyikye Mosque. We had legitimate concerns about performing at a mosque courtyard in Turkey. Yet, Ostojić was sure of herself with each step of the unexpected behaviour. If things go awry, we will get warned, or kicked out at worst; she nevertheless insisted on defending our right to use public space. Based on these assurances, the group was encouraged by moving forward with a fighting and protesting spirit, as well as an inclusive and empowering female identity, independent of geography and culture. Despite our concerns about being from Istanbul and the traditional values of people around us, we were able to move forward with Tanja’s leadership and the safe space she created. Ostojić and Tanja insisted on defending our right to use this public space. Tanja always encouraged us by moving forward with this unexpected behaviour. The performance was repeated multiple times while the group was walking.

Since the first day, each participant brought some individual and collectively. Once the group reached the performance space, various group and solo performances started to pop up. Bahar Seki grabbed her dry shampoo bottle and started performing by making continuous and repetitive movements with her whole body along with Selma Hekim’s playing of the erbane.

Gülhatun Yıldırım performed next to an empty fountain pool at the Mosque’s garden. Sitting by the fountain, Yıldırım placed dozens of ice cubes on her lap and stood still, enduring the burning pain of ice for approximately two hours, until the last ice cube melted and leaked into the empty pool. Water and its various forms is central to Yıldırım’s artistic practice. She is in constant search of her bodily limits while simultaneously hungering for new ways of interacting with water. The ephemeral and the transformative, potential of the water’s frozen form—which resonated with issues of forced nomadism, migration, and displaced communities— attracted the artist, inspiring her to create this durational piece.

After a while, the group left Yıldırım’s performance to continue their journey. But she was not left on her own—one camera person and a member of the production team stayed with her until the end of the performance. Nobody was left alone during the entire workshop.

For the second part of the day, Ostojić invited participants to rethink their performances and to redo some of them once they had been worked up and deepened.

In the wake of individual and collective re-performances, Myrtsou continued working with her grandmother’s dowry, displaying all its content and sharing it with the group. Next to this, Nazli Durak started to give herself to a domestic female activity: knitting. Because it was a collaborative work, the whole group met in front of the Kadıköy Ferryboat Docks. The last performance that day started with “Score #2: Holding the Mis(s)placed Women? Sign”. The score was first performed by Vanessa Ponte, who arrived at the meeting point already holding their sign and placed themselves next to the Kadıköy Ferryboat Docks with the historical Haydarpaşa Railway Station and the Bosphorus view in the background. They were holding a sign on which they had written “Misplaced Human!” and standing still with their red hoodie worn backwards, covering their face. It was a very strong image. Knowing that there is a human inside that body without being able to identify anything about it had a strong effect on the audience. Many passersby stopped by to watch. Sabbi Senior joined Ponte with their own sign on their red hoodie, which was a bit more difficult to read. In the words “WOMYN”. Dressed in very feminine attire (a crop top and mini skirt), they stood still next to Ponte. Next to them, Persenfo Myrtsou and Gülhatun Yıldırım, who had prepared their own signs in Turkish, joined the performance. Many asked why only “women”—they suggested that it should also include men.

15-20 minutes after Ponte started performing, a police patrol came to interrupt both the filming and the performance and
The group was led through the small streets of Kadıköy Bazaar. After waiting for a while, they gathered in a circle at the small square in front of Surp Takavor Armenian Church where numerous security cameras were installed, and started performing some warm-up exercises. Soon, police warned the group that they had to move to another location. It was time for lunch, so on their way to the restaurant, the group started drawing, Hekim took over the performance space. Her performance was about “leaving traces” and grappling with issues such as immigration, the sense of belonging, the kinship between present and past, as well as the need to leave a legacy. She lay on the floor and asked Sabbi Senior, Arzu Yayıntaş, Vanessa Ponte, and Persefoni Myrtsou to draw the outline of her body. The group started drawing, Hekim continuously moved her body until the floor was covered by multicolour lines.

The group moved to Kadıköy Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Bishop, where Persefoni Myrtsou presented her solo performance. She started by unpacking her grandmother’s dowry that she carried in her suitcase during the entire workshop since day one. It was not a simple piece of luggage full of fabrics; it also contained memories of her grandmother and community as well as her migration story and family history.

It was time to fully engage with them and confront what was embodied in them. Myrtsou started covering herself with each piece of dowry. The words were forbidden but screaming was not. Therefore, the group of ten women and queens raised their voices together through the small streets of Kadıköy. The magical moment happened when senior people started hitting some objects with their canes to support the “protest” actions of the group.

The whole workshop was a (re)discovery of what is and isn’t—what can and can’t—be performance art. Through her inclusive and pedagogical practice, Tanja Ostojić gave to the nine distinct participants the opportunity to discover, create, explore and develop a performative practice all on their own. By providing a safe space (even in public spaces) and continuous support, Ostojić encouraged self-expression, public presence, collective creation, and community building. It was a huge experience full of emotions for all the participants as well as the documentation and coordination team.

We were on the edge the entire time on the streets. It felt like we were on a battlefield. A battle we were already having every day; one we wage against the difficult conditions of being a woman or queer person in Turkey, and a struggle on behalf of the performance art practice we produce and try to protect. It was a very inspiring and empowering experience for us at Performistanbul as well. Thanks to Ostojić, we were finally able to come out to the streets and make our voices heard as we always wanted and needed.

We were not direct participants... yet, to be with the participants at all times, to witness them make their voices heard, to coordinate and facilitate the entire process—all of this made us part of the workshop and the community it created. Making public performances possible, supporting the participants and the artists during the process, and ensuring the smooth running of Ostojić’s workshop was Performistanbul’s true contribution. Ostojić’s confident yet loving and kind approach, with her openness and embrace of every proposed idea, created a space that encouraged free expression and creative experimentation. Such a unique experience was created.

Many of the interventions were not completely understood by the diverse audiences, but that did not matter, as it was not a show for others but rather a cathartic and collective display for the participants first and foremost. Performance was not simply an academic discipline within the framework of this workshop. At Performistanbul, since the early days of our founding, we have approached performance art as a communication tool to bring people together and to heal collectively, and this relationship to performance resonated deeply with Ostojić’s own methodology and her efforts to connect with the participants and the public. We prioritize our local needs over the technical ones throughout the workshop, allowing us to live art rather than simply produce it for the consumption of others.
We are thankful to all the participants and to Tanja Ostojić for revealing and sharing their unique identities, memories, experiences, and sorrows with us. We would like to sincerely thank Ostojić for making us a part of this long adventurous journey that helped us further discover ourselves, and inspired us to reclaim our public spaces and produce art in a collective and participative manner.

Now, remembering our strength as women, we feel together, and we know that we have each other. By staying a collective, staying whole, we continue transforming our cities, our companions, and ourselves.

The Writing Part:

At the end of the second part of the workshop, all participants, including the coordination team, have received Ostojić's instructions on how to write reviews and short texts including reflections about our experience of the workshop. First drafts of the texts were due before the screening and the round table at Beykoz Kundura so that participants could prepare for the public presentation. Those short texts and essays are in the process of editing by Tanja Ostojić in order to be published on the project blog.

This review has been written a half year after the workshop took place and includes a chronological description and brief analysis of all the performances and the workshop's process as a whole, comprising reflections on Tanja Ostojić's practice and our own experience as a performance art platform that coordinated the project. Besides digging through our memories, we went through the 90-minute-long documentary video about the workshop process, the notes that we gathered in September, as well as all the reflections shared by the participants. The reflections were a crucial part of the workshop, as they allowed each participant to share and analyse their own experiences of both the performance(s) they enacted as well as the one(s) they witnessed. In our review, we tried to include as much as possible their approaches and perspectives, in hopes of avoiding misinterpretations and confusions which can sometimes compromise the original intentions behind the work. The participants' perspectives cannot be extricated from the analysis. Thus, we would like to acknowledge and thank all the participants who indirectly contributed to the creation of this review, especially Perserfoni Myrtou who wrote an extremely meticulous and detailed reflective essay on the whole workshop process.

Review written by: Azra Işmen & Simge Burhanolu, Performistanbul
Edited and first published on the Mis(s)placed Women? blog by Tanja Ostojić on June 1, 2022, (Anniversary of the beginning of the Gezi-Park-Protests June 1, 2013) Updated with the Post Scriptum on June 8, 2022.

Workshop led by Tanja Ostojić

With the group and individual performances by:

Arzu Yayıntaş, Bahar Seki, Gulhatun Yıldırım, Gözem Yılmaz, Nails Durak, Perserfoni Myrtou, Sabiha Senoc Selma Hekim, Vanesa Pante and Tanja Ostojić.

Documentation Team

Gülbin Erığ - Camera, Video Editing, Güns Üçok - Camera Assistant, Burçin Aksan - Sound Operator and Kayhan Kaygusuz - Photographer

Performistanbul Team

Azra Işmen & Simge Burhanolu - Organisers and Ayda Bayram - Coordinator

Cultural Academy Tarabya

Çigdem Bişik - Program Coordinator

The Mis(s)placed Women? production in cooperation with Cultural Academy Tarabya and Performistanbul in the frame of Ostojić’s four-months-long residence in Cultural Academy Tarabya (June-September 2022).

Photo Below

Mis(s)placed Women?, Istanbul Itinerary panel at Beykoz Kundura Cinema, September 2021 Photo: K. Kaygusuz

ARZU YAYINTAŞ

Mis(s)placed Women? Performance Workshop by Tanja Ostojić

On the first day, I blanked out and got off at the wrong metro station. Running through Taksim Square, I arrived at the workshop late. The group had started the meeting; participants were sitting in a circle and explaining their motivations for taking part in it. Each person had a completely different aura and manner of self-expression. While one of them had outstanding confidence, the other one spoke as if she was singing a sweet song; her speech had a soft rhythm. While listening to them, I thought about how exciting it will be to watch them slowly open up over the next three days and how my first impressions of them will change.

As someone who has taken a break from artistic practice for four years after having children, it was a great opportunity for me to think and act together with this group of creative women.

After lunch, we started walking through Galata, my old neighbourhood that made me contemplate the transformations I’ve been through in life. I let my colourful scarf wave with the wind. Then I realised that the group had started walking backwards and waving their scarves with me, so I joined them. It was a meaningful experience for me to walk backwards on Istiklal street where I marched for years in feminist protests, and where we haven’t been able to do any demonstrations for the past five years due to police intervention. This might even have been the moment in which I discovered the power of performance art. Perserfoni took out her embroidered tablecloths (inherited from her Greek grandmother who had to flee Istanbul due to pogroms) and waved them with us, which was the move that truly completed the performance, and that brought us together as a group.

Protest Scarfs Against Withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention

A group performance action involving waving backwards on Istiklal Street and waving colourful fabrics

Protests and demonstrations are no longer permitted today on Istiklal Street, a symbolic location for Turkey's social movements. The police forces disregard the social memory of this place and don't even allow a press briefing to take place there. Us deciding to spread across Istiklal Street and walk backwards on the spur of the moment, in fact, turned out to be an out-of-the-box way of dealing with police oppression and surviving social memory. It felt as though the colourful scarves above our heads moving in the wind and swaying as we walked were representing the multiplicity of our voices. Moreover, the diversity of the fabrics bound us together despite our distances, forming a visual statement, and making us look bigger. During a century that has been marked by oppression and bans, after Turkey had withdrawn from the Istanbul Convention, walking against the flow on Istiklal Street where women have been demonstrating for women’s rights since the 1980s, chanting “Istanbul Convention Saves Lives”, meant a lot to me.

“Catcalling Men”, a group performance action involving catcalling and complimenting men while walking along Teykiye and Abdı İpekçi Street

I’ve been subjected to the male gaze and sexual harassment since I was nine years old. My story started with an old man who put his arm around my shoulder and tried to grab my breasts when I was a little girl. Later I had men calling out and flashing me on the street, trying to touch me on the bus, catcalling me on the road, and chasing me. For women, walking in public spaces feels like walking in a wild forest. You often walk looking down or with a scowl. Even though in some of these incidents of catcalling, men are complimenting women, it inevitably reminds them of their bleak, traumatic past experiences and the words they hear strike them as disturbing.

On the second day, we convened in Teykiye, one of the most upper-class neighbourhoods in Istanbul, and decided to address this patriarchal phenomenon that has been part of each of our lives since we were children. Empowered by the fact that we were acting as a group of women, we reversed the course of this familiar act and catcalled men instead. We kept saying things like “wow your eyes are so beautiful and sexy”, “are you alone?”, “nice ass!”, “wow, how strong you are?”. It was truly fascinating to observe men as they wrestled with trying to figure out how to respond. In the face of these incidents, some men were discomforted, some were embarrassed, and some were terrified. Since they didn’t have any past experiences of harassment, they received our compliments well. (At least most of them; one of them got furious and we immediately walked away from there.) This act of catcalling men during the performance felt quite empowering, and it healed at least some of the wounds that had accumulated in our bodies and minds through years of harassment and humiliating or threatening comments. Through this performance, years of suppressed anger, tension, and shame were replaced by enthusiasm, pleasure, and empowerment. Its impact was so powerful that I want to re-enact this performance regularly with different groups of women to create awareness about the harassment women are subjected to on the streets.

And then, that afternoon, I undertook a solo performance for the very first time...
“Whose Fantasy Are You?”, a solo performance, involving transforming accessories associated with the idea of a sexy woman, challenging physical boundaries at the intersection of Abdi İpekçi Street and Kadırıngalılar Street.

There are certain physical traits that are imposed on women so that they can look like women. To become the ideal, patriarchal fantasy of a woman, one must go through a set of challenges. High heels, manicured hands, fishnet stockings, uncomfortable garters, and ridiculous thongs. Some women are happy to wear these things, and others feel obligated to do so. There are certain norms and identities that society and cultural media impose on us. Women tend to accept these things without questioning. This performance was a way for me to question women’s accessories and clothes. It was important for me to do this performance in Nübnatça, where the most stylish women of Istanbul hang out in their heels. By using the clothes in a disturbing and provocative manner, I questioned their functionality and the different ways I engage with them regularly. I slipped the black fishnet stockings on my head and tied my hair up in a ponytail. I put the white garter around my neck like a scarf, and wore my high heels. Then I started putting on red nail polish. Practicing this act in public space itself felt very peculiar. I dried my nails alongside the women passing by and seeing the extent of visibility that the dock offered us. "Holding the Misplaced Women/Wymyn/ Humani Sign" performance received a lot of attention and was stopped by police. From there, we moved to a small square, and Tanja introduced our group to a number of stretches and warm-up exercises that included pelvic movements that followed the shapes of numbers from zero to ten. The pelvic movements were so impressive that they captured the attention of the women passing by and seeing the impossibility of the action made me to deconstruct the stereotypes embedded within my subconscious.

It was a truly valuable experience for me. I forgot about time and space while challenging my physical limitations. I was only focused on completing this meaningless act. The nonsensical nature and the difficulty of the action made me want to halt it after a while. I hope that the women passing by and seeing the way I used these accessories in such a provocative manner remembered how reasonable it is to refuse to wear uncomfortable heels that distort their feet or the garters that their boyfriends desire. I hope it made them question the stereotypes about women’s appearances. After this performance I feel way more emancipated while making decisions about what to wear and where to wear it.

On the third day of the workshop, we met in Kadıköy, a part of town that had completely different social dynamics. It was fascinating to see the extent of visibility that the dock offered us. "Holding the Misplaced Women/Wymyn/ Humani Sign" performance received a lot of attention and was stopped by police. From there, we moved to a small square, and Tanja introduced our group to a number of stretches and warm-up exercises that included pelvic movements that followed the shapes of numbers from zero to ten. The pelvic movements were so impressive that they captured the attention of the women passing by and seeing the impossibility of the action made me to deconstruct the stereotypes embedded within my subconscious.

This was a scream yearning to be emancipated from the oppressions that we, as women, face both in the public and private spheres. Once the voice is emancipated, the body and the soul will follow.

Concluding Thoughts:
During this three-day-long process, all of the performances realised by each individual in our group meant a lot to me. Helping Persefoni transform herself through her grandmother’s laces and tablecloth was an invaluable, emotional exchange between us. I feel like I have witnessed and taken part in a very significant moment in Persefoni’s life. Pulling Vanessa Ponte’s arms with a cord, despite knowing that my actions hurt them, bothered me a lot. But nevertheless, I kept controlling them with the cords to prevent them from putting makeup on. I still have a lot to think about regarding this dilemma: knowing that it was hurting them but doing it at their request. Likewise, trying to preserve the traces of Selma Hekim’s body and her movements, drawing the flow of her being, was a poetic experience for me.

My experiences during the Mis(s)placed Women? workshop has been very rewarding, inspiring and empowering experience that broadened my horizons and I believe that it will be an important turning point both in my professional and personal life. This was made possible by Tanja Ostojić’s special, and strong personality and her artistic experiences, which brought out the best in the workshop participants, shooting crew, and Performistanbul members, and created an incredible group dynamic.

“Catacalling Men Intervention” is a performance developed by Arzu Yayıntaş in collaboration with Tanja Ostojić as a part of Mis(s)placed Women? workshop in Istanbul, 2021.

It is not by chance that a number of the workshop participants such as Arzu Yayıntaş—artist, curator, single mother of two, and a member of the feminist movement in Istanbul—claimed that this workshop literally changed her perception of the city, and gave her courage to reclaim the public space and to express herself in it. After a three-year break in her career due to the reproductive labour of motherhood, she experienced an immense creative blast in this workshop. One of the performances that she initiated and that we performed twice together in the frame of the workshop—held in four different neighbourhods of Istanbul in the course of four days—involved catacalling men. This action of returning the gaze to the patriarchy, of transforming the incidents of harassment and shame that women are subjected to on the street, was extremely powerful. Feminist bodies took over the street, and the Persian instrument, the erbane, dominated public space. — Tanja Ostojić.
ARZU YAYINTAŞ

Score #6: Catcalling Men

Around 30 minutes, with or without preparation, minimum two performers
Location: Busy pedestrian zone

About: Catcalling is about returning the male gaze and reclaiming public space. Women of all ages and backgrounds are routinely subjected to catcallying in public spaces, usually in the form of sexually suggestive, threatening, or derisive comments. This aggressive male gaze usually causes women to feel uneasy and makes them walk looking down instead of looking straight ahead. Because of the trauma of harassment culture, women are conditioned to feel threatened even from kind words or compliments. This catcalling performance is a way of transforming the social dynamic by mirroring it, which empowers women in public space and allows them to look at the eyes of the people around them instead of staring at the pavement while walking on the street.

Instructions:
1. Select a busy pedestrian zone. It is better if it is a window-shopping area or a place where men hang out.
2. The main action can take place either while you are wandering around the neighbourhood or sitting in a busy city square where there are many pedestrians. Both can also be done in one performance act.
3. It is important to look natural in the act so if there are more than three performers then the performers should be separated into different groups.
4. Performers walk around the neighbourhood, side by side in a natural way, and start cat-calling cis men by saying phrases like “What lovely eyes you have”, “I want to melt in those eyes”, “Don’t walk like that, I am getting excited”, “There comes a real man”, and so on.
5. The performer can either look directly at the eyes of the men and comment on how they look or she can pretend as if she is chatting with the other performer while commenting loudly about the man passing by. Be creative but not derisive.
6. If the performers feel the necessity to add a sound during the catcalling they can play a simple instrument like erbu or tambourine.
7. The performance can continue for about half an hour. This performance is also a way of healing the wounds of personal harassment history, so feel free to end the performance at any moment if it causes uncomfortable feelings for you by informing your co-performers of your mental or emotional state.

Important: It is crucial not to catcall men who are accompanied by a woman, and if a man reacts aggressively do not continue with the dialogue. Remove yourself from the situation by saying “I thought you were someone else, my mistake”.

Arzu Yayintas, “Score #6: Catcalling Men”, 2022

PERSEFONI MYRTSOU

Feminist alliance building and practices of intimacy through collaborative performance and textile work: Tanja Ostojić’s Misplaced Women? workshop in Istanbul

That morning, I opened my eyes at 5:30. I could not sleep from excitement. About two years ago—right after becoming a mother—I moved my sleep-deprived body to Istanbul. I had lived in Istanbul once before, between 2011 and 2012. “The situation was so different then,” everyone says now nostalgically. The city felt like a laboratory of cosmopolitan synergies, all promising a bright future; diverse people from all over the world came to be part of Istanbul’s unique, hybridised cultural scene. The city was becoming the new global arts and culture centre; traditional, mysterious, and capable of satisfying the Orientalist consumerist needs of its visitors, but also very welcoming and more ready than ever to embrace Turkey’s erstwhile dream of becoming part of the European map.

In 2021, the first edition of Performistanbul in collaboration with Kulturakademie Tarabàya. Nine participating artists (Nazlı Durak, Gülhatun Yıldırım, Bahar Seki, Güzem Yılmaz, Nazlı Durak, Persefoni Myrtsou, Selma Hekim, Sabbi Senior, Arzu Yayintaş and myself), the Performistanbul team (Simge Burhanoğlu, Azra İymen & Ayda Bayram), the documentation team (Burçin Aktan, Gülbin Erış, Kayhan Kaygushus & Gün Uçok) and Tanja generated a unique synergy, where different transformative experiences took place in the loaded public spaces of Istanbul.

In this text, I will focus on the use of fabric and textile work in two collaborative performances that took place during the workshop. The relation between the materiality of fabric and the female body captures three central performance-related aspects that arose during the workshop: the ambivalent agency of the performing female body and objects that are assumed as “female” in the public space, the transformative potential of intimacy, care, and affective solidarity during the performance process.

In my experience, Istanbul was far from glorious. I was a stay-at-home mom with undiagnosed baby blues, an isolated artist missing my artistic practice, a struggling PhD student with no funding, a mentally anxious and physically deprived body waiting in a liminal state for a pandemic to be over. Somehow though, that morning, my body found itself running deliriously on the streets of Galata dragging a noisy suitcase and all its insecurities to the space of Performistanbul, where it would be able to perform again after a long time, and become part of the nomadic project Misplaced Women? by artist Tanja Ostojić.

For the purposes of the project, Tanja invited women and queer artists to performatively enact everyday life experiences of displacement in public spaces. Some performances were conceptualised by the artists themselves, some were asked to perform Tanja’s so-called “scores” (i.e. become one with a suitcase, hold a sign with the phrase “Misplaced Women?”). All performances operated as expressions of the power & vulnerability of the mobile female and queer body in the public space. As a whole, the project challenges the idea of singular artistic authorship, as it encourages the distribution and appropriation of Tanja’s concept by other artists. Different editions of Misplaced Women? are extensively documented in a polyphonic manner on the project’s online blog.

The four-day performance workshop (September 7-9 and 25, 2021) in Istanbul was organised and coordinated by Performistanbul in collaboration with Kulturakademie Tarabàya. Nine participating artists (Nazlı Durak, Gülhatun Yıldırım, Bahar Seki, Güzem Yılmaz, Nazlı Durak, Persefoni Myrtsou, Selma Hekim, Sabbi Senior, Arzu Yayintaş and myself), the Performistanbul team (Simge Burhanoğlu, Azra İymen & Ayda Bayram), the documentation team (Burçin Aktan, Gülbin Erış, Kayhan Kaygushus & Gün Uçok) and Tanja generated a unique synergy, where different transformative experiences took place in the loaded public spaces of Istanbul.

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The first performance, which I like calling “The Dissident Floral Tablecloths” happened on day one of the workshop (September 7, 2021). On our way to the first performance location, we stumbled upon a large banner that was hanging from the Istanbul Bar Association building on İstiklal street in the district of Beyoğlu. The banner opposed the retreat of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention in March 2021. Arzu started waving her scarf while we were walking. Once Tanja noticed it, she followed by waving her own scarf and asked other participants to join by waving pieces of fabric in the...
In my view, it is this very omnipresence of the police that put our civic resilience to the test and automatically rendered our performances political acts of resistance without this being our immediate intention.

The second performance I will analyse involves a series of collaborative actions that revolved around my grandmother’s dowry that I was carrying in my suitcase as a prop. This dowry has a special significance for my life and my family’s biography. My paternal grandparents arrived in Thessaloniki as the result of the 1923 population exchange, to the newly found state of Greece from Eastern Thrace. Both their families then settled in Thessaloniki. Some years later my grandfather married my grandmother and he tried to revive the cheese-making business he had in Eastern Thrace before being deported. Having had trauma as a veteran of the Greek-Turkish war and trauma as an uprooted refugee, he was often hospitalised and received electric shock treatments. He thus was unable to be in full control of his business, which eventually went bankrupt. Meanwhile, my grandmother was frantically embroidering. I think it was her way of dealing with the situation. The dowry was passed on to my aunt who never married, and it eventually ended up in my hands. I am now the owner of numerous carefully embroidered pieces that somehow feel like carrying my family’s unresolved multigenerational trauma.

My idea for Tanja’s workshop was to distribute the dowry items to other women and specifically to my co-participants in the workshop. Those who wanted to get involved in this collaborative performance selected an item from the dowry and worked with it throughout the three days of the workshop. Each day, we would set aside some time to sit together, talk, and collectively embroider items from my grandmother’s dowry in different locations in the public space.

I used to hesitate to use the dowry as a political weapon for my white feminisms. Is it respectful to my grandfather’s dowry if I give it to others? Do I have the right to give dowry pieces away? Was I doing my female ancestors—the makers of this dowry—justice? Watching my fellow participants leave their marks on my grandmother’s dowry was a somehow unsettling and at the same time empowering experience. The sight of needle piercing the fine fabrics that were so well taken care of by my grandmother caused me discomfort. At the same time, the practice of embroidering in the public space brought to light an important question: how does a craft such as embroidery fit our needs and desires as feminists today? Embroidery—or any sort of traditionally female practice—can operate as an autodidactic form of feminist emancipation and healing as it transgresses its traditional silence and domesticity. When connected to its loaded and long genealogy of unpaid female domestical labour, this therapeutic aspect of embroidery has the potential to transform into a form of civic resistance.

Each participant mended their autobiographies in different ways onto the dowry items. Arzu embroidered an iconic vulva on an underwear panty that belonged to my grandmother, and used a razor boncugu to represent the clitoris. Sultan picked a small, embroidered cloth and placed it in an old chest that she received as a present from an old Kurdish lady who was her neighbour. In this way, she generated a psychic intergenerational dialogue between women and their objects. Tanja stitched the date September 6–7, 1955 onto another item. This significant mark states the Istanbul pogrom that happened in 1955 against the non-Muslim minorities—predominantly the Greek minority—and it accidentally coincided with the workshop’s date. Nazlı could not bear the breath-taking honesty that the textile work helped her come to terms with her own history and the collective guilt of belonging to the group of presumed perpetrators, i.e. the Turks. Her willingness and bravery to take responsibility for a past which, in my view, she should not feel responsible for, shook me to the core. For Misplaced Women?, the fabrics of the workshop served as a platform for personal and political journeys. As a platform, the dowry transcended its old symbolic function as a measuring tool for a bride-to-be’s value, and became a synergetic tool of feminist agency and shared authorship.

The collective textile work that took place during the workshop gave us a chance to connect, to test out memory techniques together, and to re-shape the value of our diverse female materialities. Above all, this experience offered us the possibility to rewrite the story of personal heritage, find some kind of reconciliation with our difficult pasts and intersecting histories, and eventually imagine common futures that are not based on blood kinship but on new types of empowering psychic and corporeal alliances.

Quoted Sources:


Ostojić, Tanja. Misplaced Women. Online blog of the ongoing project since 2009: https://misplacedwomen.wordpress.com


https://facebook.com/persoulitina/posts/10160098031918203

[All links were visited on May 14, 2022]

NAZLI DURAK

I decided to take part in this workshop because of my investment in dance and performance as a feminist methodology—one that highlights the relationship between the body and spatial memory. As an artist, I seek to transform my dance-based performance into a collaborative action that addresses issues about the violations of rights—and this is exactly what I was able to do through the Misplaced Women? workshops.

On September 7, we commemorated the pogrom in which the Armenians, Greeks, Jews, and other minorities were deported from Istanbul, and their homes and workplaces were looted. Those events took place in Beyoğlu (in 1955), which is why I felt particularly sensitive. I was contemplating how violence was embedded within the history of this place that I walked through on a daily basis. Following Tanja’s suggestion, we started “walking backwards” on İstiklal Street. Arzu was holding her scarf in her hand, and with the wind, it was waving like a “flag”. For centuries, people have fought over a piece of fabric on battlefields, how loaded an object could be... Every flag has its own story, and the way we relate to the flag is also determined by this story. Selma gave me her spare scarf. Once all of us held our scarves and let them flow in the wind, I was comforted by the image of these women’s flags, with various colours and patterns. Right at that moment, I saw the banner hanging on the Bar Association Building’s facade that read “Istanbul Convention Saves Lives”. I told Tanja that Turkey had withdrawn from this convention and that the lives and rights of women, girls, and LGBTQ+ individuals were at stake. We chanted “Dünya yerinden oynar kadınlar özgür olsun” [The world would move out of its joints if women were free]. A few people asked what our demonstration was about. Police arrived and ordered us to leave.

We decided to head to Mis Street. While we were sitting there, Persőfini who is from Greece made Turkish coffees for us. She opened her luggage filled with beautiful fabrics and offered to embroider her grandmother’s clothes. Purses, necklaces, threads, scissors, pieces of cloth, macrame cords, crocheted needles, glittery threads... Whatever you can imagine was there; Persa opened a chest full of treasures for us. We became just like neighbours sitting on our stoops, hanging out. We had woven a world around us with threads, knitted items, and fabrics in this small, cozy tea shop selling smelly tea in Beyoğlu. Inspired by how my mother used to embroider our initials on our towels when we were in kindergarten, I...
the only parts of me that survived the full-body cover—which and only took my hands out of the tulle to play the ukulele.

In this performance, I covered my whole body with black tulle and only took my hands out of the tulle to play the ukulele. It was clear that I was just learning to make art. Later, Nazlı accompanied me. She herself is a dancer; she danced as if she did not know how to dance. Our voices and dances were enthusiastic, we danced and had fun like children, and this protest against our deprivation as artists transformed into a performance of liberation and empowerment.

Once we picked a place to settle, I decided to do a dance performance using the little girl costumes Arzu had brought. Children subjected to forced migration are often the ones who are faced with the most severe forms of violence and whose rights are violated with impunity. At an age when they're supposed to play on the streets, and dream of beautiful futures, they're forced to take dangerous and unknown paths. While the erbane's tunes accompanied me, I pondered the long migration routes walked by many small feet, and felt in my heart incomplete and alienated from the world.

Mis(s)placed Women

Bir women entering public space is really important.

Sabbi: Actually, I wrote a little piece about it. In the beginning, this was a completely spontaneous situation, from simply sitting in the square and looking around and feeling and taking it in... All of these materials, we found nearby and, yes, I'd like to read what I wrote:

**Upon a Blanket in the Square**

Sabbi Senior: I'm Sabbi. I'm American. My motivation to join this workshop is mostly because, as I've travelled from place to place, I've had to shape-shift in each place that I go. In each place that I go, the rights that I have as a woman change. As a queer person, they change and change and change. So I think this point about women entering public space is really important.

Tanja Ostojić: I understood also that it could be enriching for you to draw on the experience from this workshop for your queer activism, right? Sabbi and Gizem, you were both doing this incredible "Vegan Breakfast" performance, and the moment I saw it I immediately recognised it as a reconstruction of the breakfast that ended violently in the Maçka Park on June 22, 2021. I really love the way in which you went around, found some garbage, brought it together, and crafted this fantastic dialogue piece. So, I'd like to hear about it from both of you.

Gizem Yılmaz: I just had an idea, because we were in a square, and it was such a fancy square—people liked taking photos of us while sipping their fancy drinks, and then I was inspired. I said, let's do something like this Sabbi, let's pretend. I just started mirroring.

Sabbi: Actually, I wrote a little piece about it. In the beginning, this was a completely spontaneous situation, from simply sitting in the square and looking around and feeling and taking it in... All of these materials, we found nearby and, yes, I'd like to read what I wrote:

Upon a Blanket in the Square

Gizem Epifani

Poor Woman Artist

Mis(s)placed Women? is a workshop consisting of women and queer people, brought to life by Tanja Ostojić. We decided on the topics, the flow, the presentation—all completely together, and with total spontaneity. The following is my reflection on the performance that impacted me the most.

Being an artist in Turkey is very difficult, especially if you are in your early years. It is almost impossible to make money from it. If you come from a traditional family and a small town and are a woman, you may have to beg to be accepted. You may even have to starve to continue being able to do what you love, your art. I'm a vocalist in my own band, and I get very little money for my work. Sometimes it seems impossible to make money from my own art. I wanted to address this situation of the poor woman artist, and to show her transformation into an anonymous beggar on the street.

In this performance, I covered my whole body with black tulle and only took my hands out of the tulle to play the ukulele. The only parts of me that survived the full-body cover—which drew on the symbolism of the religious veil, cloistering, and de-identification—were my hands strumming the instrument that is, hope and creativity. I didn't know how to play the ukulele. It was clear that I was just learning to make art. Later, Nazlı accompanied me. She herself is a dancer; she danced as if she did not know how to dance. Our voices and dances were enthusiastic, we danced and had fun like children, and this protest against our deprivation as artists transformed into a performance of liberation and empowerment.
Mis(s)placed Women?

Upon a Blanket in the Square

Pouring from an empty cup.
The arms of the police.
scattered like the running people of protest emanating out of pores disorganised as if it to be the escape from humanity as the pieces became surfaces, imprints, recollections, a shield arms until the pieces became so small that we travelled to the limbs of the body, the each rip something slow and careless tossed into the sky comes the feeling of what is destroyed as I wrote on these pieces of cardboard the total blur between picnic to dine, versus picnic to die the profound deprivation of experience each consumption transform the surreal into this apocalyptic reality each bite that we took of these inorganic materials Maçka Park echoed into our pens phrases unsaid shredding to pieces we took pens, one blue and one pink yet our blanket filthy and in plain sight as gentle music floated through the air the dystopia setting in with each refill of our glass the dysphoria grew over time as it normalised and settled in the feeling of dehumanisation an empty can of gasoline concrete and cardboard an empty can of gasoline we intervened and asked the waiter to give us cups cups we then filled over and over from our bottle of gasoline each time dousing and increasing the intoxication behaviours as childlike mimicry to sip from the glass to salute to the merriment to discuss only the most wonderful and fabulous things with each refil of our glass the dysphoria grew as we served each other to taste the consumption with only a broken fork we shedded pieces of cardboard and ate them like decadence we picked up crumbled rocks of concrete with our teeth we chewed on the cardboard covered in dirt from the ground we smiled and posed for Instagram posts from our cardboard phones cup after cup yet our gasoline never ran out and we started to shred the materials the dystopia setting in as gentle music floated through the air a perfect peace and undisturbed yet our blanket filthy and in plain sight we did the same thing each night, then we returned to our hotel and would fall asleep so quickly, in an almost dreamless sleep the next morning the second one was a dance performance where I asked my co-performers to tie their arms or legs in order to explore their bodies in a different way and to feel the pressure of physical constriction and limitation, and the third one was about queer oppression, where participants would tie me and try to stop me from expressing myself. Since I usually express myself with painting, using my body was out of my comfort zone and it taught me a lot of new things about me and about performance art more broadly. I am thrilled that I could have such a valuable experience with everyone who participated in the workshop, and it was a great pleasure to work with Tanja Ostojić.

The last performance that I did together with my co-performers was the most important to me, especially since it was about the oppression of queer people. Living is hard when you are non-binary and queer. It gets scary when you feel the hate people have for you just because you exist. They try everything in their hands to stop you and to force you to be “normal”. It’s sad how people try to change who other people are. In this performance I wanted to represent the oppression that the queer community is under. By asking the participants to tie any place of my body and pull it in order to get in the way of me putting on my makeup, I wanted to show that oppression in a physical form. Making this performance in Kadıköy was very important for me too. While Kadıköy was usually a safe space for queer people, recently it has started to change and become a dangerous place to be openly queer. Queer-friendly places in the area started to get conquered by cis white males and hate crimes started to occur.

I’m a half-Polish and half-Portuguese queer person, currently living in Istanbul and trying to become an artist. I am studying architecture at Bilkent University and am a co-founder of Ammonite Gallery.

CHAPTER 6: WORKSHOPS | ISTANBUL

VANESSA PONTÉ

After this point was when we began to paint on the can. And in this way reclaim what this object and this symbol is. Whether it is, you know, for destruction or whether it is for fuel.
BAHAR SEKİ

My motivation for taking part in this workshop was to explore my areas of interest, such as immigration and women's rights, and to do so through an artistic process that would be held in a public space. In the end not only did I achieve these initial ambitions for the workshop, I also made new mental connections through my performances that went far beyond my expectations. These connections were shaped by concepts, acts, and objects such as dowry, yarn, knitting, leaving a mark, moving, and bonding.

My participation in performances of others were based on playing daff, while my solo performance that was about leaving a mark took place on the last day of the workshop, inspired by all these thoughts turning in my head. The marks that a woman leaves on the ground, marks that change with her movements, and the support she received from other women while creating her marks—that became my focus. Since I am not a performance artist I was not sure about myself before the performance, but after I started I felt relaxed, and felt completely supported by the women who were drawing my silhouette.

Since the beginning of the workshop, thoughts about Persefoni’s grandmother's dowry were running through my mind. I thought about performatively connecting the pieces of cloth, intertwining them, embroidering the fabric, as well as the emotional meaning that lay behind these acts and that exceeded mere functionality. The dowry became a conduit for each of our hopes, dreams, and emotions. Persefoni’s grandmother had to emigrate, and her hopes while making her dowry did not unfold the way she had imagined. But in the workshop, every part of the dowry—which contained her marks and traces within it—was taken up by other women, and her marks were reproduced and repurposed by these women in the same land she had to emigrate from.

This dowry reminded me of an article that I wrote a few years ago about my grandmother and the chest of another woman. It was about how I couldn’t own my grandmother’s chest, but instead I inherited the chest of another old woman from Erzincan. There was a photo of this chest with my grandmother’s rug on it in the article. In the end of the article I wrote, “it is not known whose grandmother’s belongings will stay in whose house. It is never known where the adventure of an item will begin and end.”

Now a piece from Persefoni’s grandmother’s dowry ended up in this chest, and the stories of those three women from different parts of Anatolia are beautifully connected.

One of main motivations for me to attend the workshop was that it was dealing with issues of displacement, womanhood, and queerness.

It felt like a romantic encounter for me to come together with all these female artists at the Misplaced Women? workshop, especially because I knew they cared for me in the same way I cared for them. I felt that I belonged somewhere, and this feeling is very important in my life. My favourite memory was my performance dedicated to refugee women in front of the Louis Vuitton store in Nişantaşı. Selma Hekim played erbane at the Abdi İpekçi Square, determining the rhythm of my movements. During the performance, passers-by were watching us; they would stop walking and film us, and wonder what we were doing. It was very good for me to watch the surprise of the audience, and to know that we were confusing them. I was carrying a lot of tension inside me as I performed; it made me feel good to raise awareness about refugee women’s issues through my performance, but the knowledge that these audience members did not care about the plight of these women heightened my anger. I wanted to expose their hypocrisy and bring to light the suffering of others that they repress every day.

This act of exposure and connection starts deeply with my interests as a filmmaker. Last year, I directed a mid-length documentary that was focused on issues of displacement and the effects of the place you live on your identity. It focused on people from different generations, mostly women, who had lived in the same neighbourhood all their lives, only to be forced to evacuate their home due to urban transformation. When I asked them what they regretted most in life, one woman said, “Let me keep it to myself.” I tried to show in my documentary what she couldn’t say and why she couldn’t say it. I was interested in the act of opening up; of confessing or withholding intimate stories, and the various reasons for that. When I asked another woman about her saddest moment, she replied, “I had a heart attack” while eating a watermelon. Though she was laughing at the same time, she was telling me “I was dying.”

I am an actress and documentary director living in Istanbul.

I was motivated to take part in the workshop because my artistic practice engages deeply with themes of change, transformation, and groundlessness, and I often perform in public spaces using my body. In total, I participated in five of the collective performances during the workshop, but it was my solo performance that I found most challenging. I undertook my solo performance by the empty pool in the garden of Teyyikye Mosque, Istanbul, on September 8, 2021, the second day of the Misisplaced Women? workshop, between 2-4 pm.

I started by placing an ice cube in everyone’s palms, thus including them in the process. Persefoni and Aza sat close to me to support me, while Tanja touched my back and whispered something about the performance in my ear. The ice cubes on my lap kept melting, pouring down my feet into the empty pool. Simge climbed inside the pool, and she placed a glass with a plant inside, right under my feet. I placed a lot of ice cubes on my lap and waited for them to melt, to become liquid, to make me wet and spread across space. I have a lot of childhood memories related to water and ice, both good and bad. Water and ice have the potential to give birth, sustain, and heal, as well as to destroy, kill, and eradicate. Slippery surfaces, wet stairs, huge icicles on the roofs and balconies in winter, floods, deaths in the sea, rainfalls, hail, snow, cold, death by freezing, rivers, large bodies of water...

When I was about ten years old, I lived in a rural town. It was the end of August. Suddenly it got dark during the day and a storm broke out, followed by heavy rainfall. Enormous blocks of ice. Ice blocks as big as walnuts and apples were falling from the sky to the ground, hitting our bodies. I fled inside and watched anxiously from the window, because I had never seen such a thing. There was a huge tree right in front of the house—a willow tree with branches that extended to the sky infinitely. Black stains started appearing. When I looked up into the sky, I saw that pitch-black crows were falling to the ground. It was almost like an act of collective suicide. The ground was covered with a black furry blanket. The moist soil, trees, grass, and ice blocks. I was astonished to witness the role that water and ice plays in the cycles of life and death. I have never forgotten that lesson.

I’m a performance artist living in Istanbul. I also work with painting and photography, and am invested in themes of life, death, nature, essence, and roots.
“Transitioned Out” is a multidisciplinary project encompassing performance, poetry, drawing, video, and installation. The series deals with the history of the breakup of Yugoslavia and its ensuing social chaos, connecting it to the economic and social “transition” from socialism to forms of wild capitalism initiated in the 1990s. The project connects these historical processes of dispossession and destruction to more recent events of the so-called refugee crisis which saw tens of thousands of migrants fleeing their countries in Asia and the Middle East, trying to traverse the Balkan region to come to the West. The ex-Yugoslav countries, themselves ripped apart by capitalist exploitation and neocolonial politics, are forced by the EU to stop the crossing of migrants, in effect turning themselves into sacrificial zones in which both the migrants and the local population, also trying to escape to the EU, are trapped outside the Schengen wall. Of particular focus are the marks these processes leave on the female body. As someone who was born in Bosnia and became a refugee in 1992, I have been observing these events from a personal perspective, trying to understand how various waves of crises have shaped the political, economic, and social lives of women. (B. Videkanić)

Bojana Videkanić

TAN TAN

TANYA URY
“love in the time of corona”, 2020, concrete poem and a poetic narrative, Cologne.

“love in the time of corona” by Tanya Ury is a contribution by invitation to Ostojić’s Mis(s)placed Women? project, which Ury has contributed to greatly since 2009. This poetic narrative, contending with themes of isolation as well as misplacement because of age and illness even before the time of corona, incorporates quotations from Gabriel García Márquez, Hélène Cixous, Russell Hoban, and Paul Celan.

First published by T. Ostojić on the Mis(s)placed Women? project blog, June 6, 2020.


For my 2019 iteration of the "Misplaced Women? Score #1", at Berlin-Gesundbrunnen Train Station, I spent some time thinking about my own feelings of being misplaced, my feeling of "place" while in Berlin, a city I'd only visited once before as a young woman. My feelings of misplacement as a working class woman in the UK art world, my feelings of "place" while in Berlin, a city I'd only visited once before as a young woman, and my experiences of colonial and fascist times. Suzy is very knowledgeable about the Bode Museum. This topic resonated with me, as I was also interested in the treasures and objects painted over, scratched, slit, altered, cut apart, erased, and combined. Suzy produced protective objects (as with religious or pagan contexts) that protect her (and me as her co-performer) from these pieces of architecture with which she is so fascinated... (T. Ostojić)

We realised so far two performances together: "Misplaced Sculptures" in front of and around the Bode, and "Misplaced Women? Score #1: Unpacking a Bag of Your Own" in front of the Charlottenburg castle, whose architecture—in contrast to the Bode, and the Potdams City Hall—signifies safety to her... For the performances, Suzy produced protective objects (as with religious or pagan contexts) that protect her (and me as her co-performer) from these pieces of architecture with which she is so fascinated... (T. Ostojić)

I worked with Suzy between 2017–2019 trying to extend and develop in the media of performance art her obsession with the “imprisoned” sculptures inside the Bode Museum. This topic resonated with me, as I was also interested in the treasures and objects painted over, scratched, slit, altered, cut apart, erased, and combined. Suzy produced protective objects (as with religious or pagan contexts) that protect her (and me as her co-performer) from these pieces of architecture with which she is so fascinated... (T. Ostojić)

The topic of "place" is so fascinated... (T. Ostojić)

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In my practice, I try to understand women's unique voices through the conversations I have with them and through getting to know their different backgrounds. I try to be the "inbetweener" or the interpreter between the art world and groups of non-artists. Broadening access to art is an important aspect of my artistic practice, just as broadening access to language is central to my interpreting work.

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This publication is based on Mis(s)placed Women? (2009-2022), a collaborative art project by Tanja Ostojić, published in English and Turkish to accompany the exhibition at Depo Istanbul, September 15–October 30, 2022. Due to constraints of space, only a selection of the artworks and texts have been included.

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Mis(s)placed Women? Blog: https://mispacedwomen.wordpress.com/
Mis(s)placed Women? Video Channel: https://vimeo.com/channels/1482708

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Mis(s)placed Women?

A Collaborative Art Project

2009-2022

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