The Mercurian

A Theatrical Translation Review
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The Mercurian is named for Mercury who, if he had known it, was/is the patron god of theatrical translators, those intrepid souls possessed of eloquence, feats of skill, messengers not between the gods but between cultures, traders in images, nimble and dexterous linguistic thieves. Like the metal mercury, theatrical translators are capable of absorbing other metals, forming amalgams. As in ancient chemistry, the mercurian is one of the five elementary "principles" of which all material substances are compounded, otherwise known as "spirit." The theatrical translator is sprightly, lively, potentially volatile, sometimes inconstant, witty, an ideal guide or conductor on the road.

The Mercurian publishes translations of plays and performance pieces from any language into English. *The Mercurian* also welcomes theoretical pieces about theatrical translation, rants, manifestos, and position papers pertaining to translation for the theatre, as well as production histories of theatrical translations. Submissions should be sent to: Adam Versényi at anversen@email.unc.edu or by snail mail:

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For translations of plays or performance pieces, unless the material is in the public domain, please send proof of permission to translate from the playwright or original creator of the piece. Since one of the primary objects of *The Mercurian* is to move translated pieces into production, no translations of plays or performance pieces will be published unless the translator can certify that he/she has had an opportunity to hear the translation performed in either a reading or another production-oriented venue.

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the Fall 2025 issue of *The Mercurian*!

We begin with Henning Bochert's translation of Özlem Özgül Dündar's play *body without borders*. The translation has its genesis in a collaboration between Jospeh Megel, Artistic Director of UNC's the Process Series, and Bochert that began with Theatrical Translation as Creative Process: A Conference Festival here at UNC-Chapel Hill in 2019. In 2022 they co-taught a course on U.S. drama at Humboldt University in Berlin, while simultaneously working with Dündar as she wrote the play. The translation was first performed in 2023 by the Process Series with Megel as director. As Bochert discusses in his introduction to the translation, Dündar's play deals with the history of violence perpetrated against foreign workers from Southern European countries in Germany from the 1950s to the present day. The play's highly poetic text presents particular challenges for English translation and performance. Bochert's translation of Bernard Studlar's *iPlay* appeared in Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring 2015), and his translation of Martin Heckmanns' *A Man Walks Into the World* appeared in Vol. 3, No. 4 (Fall 2011).

body without borders is followed by *Silent Days, Sleepless Nights* written and translated by Carmen Pellegrinelli. The play takes place in Bergamo, Italy, a city devastated by the worldwide pandemic in 2020. Pellegrinelli led a theatre workshop with doctors and nurses from the emergency department of Bergamo's largest hospital who were traumatized by the events of 2020. Based on testimonies and improvisations from the workshop *Silent Days, Sleepless Nights*, while located in a particular time and place speaks to all of us who experienced the pandemic and continue to deal with its repercussions today.

The issue concludes with several book reviews, including Daniel Smith's review of *The Inheritor: A Play* by Théâtre de l'Aquarium, translated by Kate Bredeson and Thalia Wolff; Kathleen Jeffs' review of *The Entremés for Performance: Translations of One-Act Plays from Golden Age Spain*, ed. Kerry K. Wilks and Ian M. Borden; Sophie Siegel-Warren's review of *The Plays of Aristide Tarnagda: Contemporary Francophone Theatre From Burkina Faso,* edited and translated by Heather Jeanne Denyer and Anna G.R. Miller; and, finally, Catherine Boyle's review of Jean Graham-Jones' *Contemporary Performance Translation. Challenges and Opportunities for the Global Stage*. Smith's translation of Mariveaux' s *Love in* Disguise appeared Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 2012) and Graham-Jones' translation of Ricardo Monti's *Apocalypse Tomorrow* appeared in Vol. 2, No. 1 (Summer 2008).

Back issues of *The Mercurian* can be found at under the "Archives" tab on our website: https://the-mercurian.com/. As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 11, No. 1 Spring 2026 will be February 15, 2026.

—Adam Versényi

body without borders

By Özlem Özgül Dündar

Translated from German by Henning Bochert

Özlem Özgül Dündar is a German playwright from Solingen, born in 1983. Her play *an grenzen*, which I translated into English, narrates the continued history of violence against the foreign workers from South European countries who were hired to build Germany's economy after WWII, tracing rejection and prejudice from the 1950s to growing violence and straight murder in the 21st century.

The text is a radical, poetic and tender approach to the topic, sparked by a series of racist murders in Germany between 1999 and 2010 by a group that named itself the NSU, short for national-socialist underground. Their nine victims were shop owners, vendors, businesspeople of mostly Turkish background, also one Greek man and one female police officer. They attempted 43 murders and committed three bomb attacks and 15 robberies. The police were only able to track them down, because they had started claiming the murders. When the arrest was imminent, two men apparently killed themselves, while their collaborator, Beate Zschäpe, was arrested and has been in prison ever since. It is suspected that the network was or is much larger.

Dündar manages to navigate this complex topic with a very personal style and narration. One voice talks to another, silent You, clearly yearning understanding and proximity from the other one. The voice, envisioned female by the playwright and talking in the second person, often refers to her parents, her mother's line of factory work in the metal industry, piecework at the conveyor belt, a particularly dehumanizing occupation. The early wounds on her mother's body, inflicted by handling the metal workpieces, the famous Solingen blades, later become bodies being openly attacked first with fire, and finally with guns and bullets – once again metal in a different shape.

For me as the translator, the specific challenges of the text lay in its specific, insistent language. Its physical references, its materialist terminology and sensual quality all serve to create a proximity, a tenderness of style, rendering any racist interpretations impossible. The themes of body, work and injury dominate in the approach. Strictly avoiding any higher register, any academic, 'complicated' terminology, Dündar succeeds in creating a play with a particularly low educational threshold – a very inclusive approach. At the same time, she supports this on a formal level by notating her text entirely in minuscules and without any punctuation. In German, where the written language indicates nouns and surnames by capital initials, and where punctuation rules are much stricter than in English, this choice of notation creates an artificial type face on the page, echoing a tradition which goes back at least to the poet Stefan George who lived and wrote the 19th century.

In the spoken-word performance, this formal aspect is seemingly lost, since we don't see the language in its written form. But only seemingly so. In the written German, punctuation serves, much more than in English, to create an order and syntactical hierarchy between the parts of a sentence, thus clarifying the information and making sense of the language. If the playwright

decides to drop interpunctuation, she necessarily has to write in a profoundly different way to avoid constant misunderstandings or confusion, i. e. to make the text intelligible. What she gains is first a different reading experience, evoking a very visible horizontal quality of the text, its even set of letters and uninterrupted flow of words translating into a non-hierarchical mindset. What has been said about George's poetry is true for Dündar's writing as well: the small print together with avoiding all punctuation endows a text with an austere and at the same time solemn appearance. While she started out writing an extremely casual text, she took out most of the all too casual modal particles during the writing process, yet retaining the text's personal, almost simplistic, colloquial register. This is balanced by the poetic form which creates an elevated tension. By virtue of all these elements and aspects, language becomes a strong tool that the translation needs to respect.

But how can that be achieved in a translation into English, where the capital initial letter is a rare thing, and an occasional 'i' instead of a capital 'I' will look like a misprint rather than a stylistic choice? Standard English writing ruled out applying the same device since it would disappear, would be undetectable, and that blade, so sharp in German, would, if employed literally, turn blunt in English. After much experimenting, I played with taking out not only the rare comma in the English translation but eventually all punctuation including apostrophes, reducing the ciphers on the page to letters only. And it turned out that there were very many apostrophes in 'don't's and 'aren't's, given the colloquial nature of the play's language, and also the ones indicating the possessive form. Taking them out created an artificiality on the page that felt very close to what Dündar had achieved in the German text, combining non-academic, everyday language with an ascetic quality of the reading experience. In places, Dündar's choice of simplistic language to describe complex matters reminded me of my work with Susan Glaspell's prose. Glaspell too, slipping into the minds of her often working-class characters, used simple language to describe complex or abstract phenomena. In Dündar's play, this occasionally leads to repetitive terminology, creating a special rhythm.

From the outset, Joseph Megel of UNC in Chapel Hill, NC, and I designed the translation for a reading in The Process Series, which Joseph directs. During that process, Joseph and I taught a seminar on contemporary American drama at Humboldt University in Berlin as guest lecturers in 2022, including *an grenzen* and its translation. We both accompanied Özlem's writing process over one and a half years, and during those seven weeks of teaching in Berlin, we repeatedly met with Özlem to discuss the play that was still in the making, analyze its context and language, and how it could be made relevant for a U.S. audience in an English translation. There is, for example, the extensive list of victims killed by right-wing violence. This non-narrative list of crimes in Germany since the middle of the 20th century takes up a relatively large portion of the play. Any production will be challenged with the task of dramatizing it, all the more so a production for an English language audience from a different cultural background. When it became obvious during our seminar that young Germans were unable to recognize the references to the 1990s violence, and that an American audience unfamiliar with German history would be much less able to follow those leads, the playwright decided to insert further historical information which helped a lot to contextualize the reference. The communication between Özlem and myself, between writer and translator shaped both the German and the English text.

From a line in the first drafts, Joseph suggested the English title *body w/o borders*. My colleague

Neil Blackadder, who had translated other texts by the same writer, helped with a difficult passage. The play was first performed in a staged reading in The Process Series, directed by Joseph Megel, on April 20 and 21, 2023. The text was interpreted on stage by actress Sanjana Taskar.

Özlem Özgül Dündar, born 1983 in Solingen, works as a writer and performer. She writes plays, radio plays, essays, and poems. She is the author of "gedanken zerren“, poems (ELIF 2018), and editor, among others, of „Flexen – Flaneusen* schreiben Städte“, short prose by several female writers (Verbrecher 2019). These plays are currently playing: "an grenzen" (Staatstheater Wiesbaden) and “Mädchenschrift" (Lübeck Theater, Staatstheater Karlsruhe). She performs with her collectives *Ministerium für Mitgefühl* (*Ministry of Empathy*) and *kollektiv flexen*. Currently, she is a guest publisher with Elif Verlag. Selected awards: Kelag 2018, Kaas & Kappes 2024.

Henning Bochert works as a writer, lecturer, dramaturg, and translator in Berlin. Numerous German and international productions. Publications about theater and translation. Curator of several festivals. Seminars at Humboldt University in Berlin, Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf, Ruhr University in Bochum. Since 2007, he has been on the board of raum4 – netzwerk für künstlerische alltagsbewältigung e. v., and since 2009, of Drama Panorama: Forum for Translation and Theater e. V., an international platform for theater translators. He is a member the German Translators Association (BDÜ), the Association of German Language Translators of Literary and Scientific Works (VdÜ), of the Weltlesebühne, of the playwrights union VTheA, and of The Fence. From 2014-2019, he was a member of the German committee of the European network for drama in translation Eurodram. Publications, translations and productions here: http://www.henningbochert.de/en/

body w/o borders

A monologue

By Özlem Özgül Dündar

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here i stand and you are standing next to me first you were standing farther away you have moved and i have moved we both set ourselves in motion we set our bodies in motion stood a little apart at first and are now standing close together so close that if we reached out we could touch each other so close that if we took another step a big step we would be standing nose to nose so close we would be able to smell each other although i think i can smell you even now very lightly i perceive a scent that must be coming from you it must be your scent that i am smelling you are the only one so close to me right now it can only be your odor that i smell right now a little bit of detergent in the air underneath a bit of a sweaty odor a little bit of sweat and deodorant very light but all that is not close to me yet it has not fully permeated my nose yet it is not yet everywhere the space is not quite full of your body odor we could be even closer so that we would really touch so that our noses had a moment of touching that is how close we could be but the moment we meet is really not that long it passes very quickly because because we do not take enough time when we meet enough time to talk to chat to exchange really looking at each other and taking in each others face the lines of the face age written into this face perhaps indicators of the character behind this face looking at each other to like see how that person laughs how he reacts what she sounds like what are they like what makes that person in front of me tick where is he from what does she do how does that person live we dont have the time for that and we dont have the patience nor do we have the ease not physically like our muscles they are not relaxed nor do we have the ease of mind like this meeting someone and being open for the encounter we are not open in our encounters this lightness is missing the lightness with which you meet others whom you dont know whom you may perhaps want to or could know that lightness that begins with a greeting something like a handshake or just a nod or a smile a friendly smile inviting such a smile indicating that you are ready for this encounter that you are in the mood for it that you are glad to meet someone that you are ready now to listen to that person and their voice to take that in the way that person is and with that engage in an interaction and to tell or reveal something about yourself to present yourself with your voice and your ways your stories and perhaps even exchange something personal personal thoughts perhaps even tell someone something that shows who you really are and what makes you tick and to share something personal thats signaling trust you trust this other person standing in front of you whom you hadnt known until then or only a little or whom you only knew a few facts about or whom you perhaps only knew enough to recognize their face but not more this sharing of something personal shows that you put trust in that person standing in front of you that you feel this person to be someone in whose hands the information the knowledge that you give away about yourself is safe that this person will handle it well that this person will handle this knowledge trustworthily responsibly so you trust someone and give this person knowledge about yourself this could for example happen if we had time in our encounters if we had this openness that might begin with a smile a small movement of the lips it does not have to be a very confident talk no thats not what i mean i mean this simple trust not this lets keep this between the two of us thats not the trust i mean but the everyday trust this basic trust that you bring when you meet each other on the street in traffic in everyday talk among strangers over a handshake while going home late in the evening but we dont meet with the time nor the ease necessary to bring yourself to smile we are not open when we meet we remain unknown to each other our ears are not open to each others words nor do we have the time we do not afford the time we would need to understand our words properly we lack the patience to stop and wait for what the other one has to say to slowly feel the way none of this we do although we had so much time to get to know each other much time to stop and wait to see who that is in front of me we really had a lot of time

but time doesnt seem to be the issue

actually our hands would have to reach out for each other for the hands but also for the other body hold it we should shake each other up to be so awake that we are fully there you see stand clear as daylight in front of each other so we are awake really see the other one standing right in front of us so i would have to see that you are standing in front of me and you would have to see that i am standing in front of you with both eyes and with both hands too we would have to stand in front of each other in full perception of the other so that we could see each other in detail and as a whole it takes a certain proximity to communicate to talk to each other i mean in order to talk with each other we would have to stand in front of each other quite clearly clearly perceive each other we would first have to shake each other awake you see because that is something we dont think about and in order to think about it to think about that to talk to each other we first need to shake each other awake and i would have to do that with these hands do you see these hands my hands they may seem familiar look here take a good look you must have seen them often although maybe not consciously looked at them during our previous encounters look you know my hands there are millions of them in germany they came a long way before arriving here and here their journey will always continue these are the recruited hands the hired hands and the hired bodies and the hired muscles this body these are the same hands that want to shake us awake so we will meet wide awake maybe you even recognize this body standing in front of you

look closly i admit fashion has changed a bit for sure it has changed now that i think about it maybe even the faces yes they may have changed too the face of someone looking at the world without understanding the language around him and the face of someone understanding the language around her are likely different if you know peoples gestures or dont know them if you know their postures or not if you know their stories or not the world will be a different one depending on what we know about it or dont know maybe the face reveals some of what is going on inside someones head they may give an impression a vague one of whats going on inside that head you will never know for sure of course even if someone tells you im thinking such and such you still wont know what someone is or is not thinking i would like to put my hands on your and my shoulders and shake us so we are both wide awake and see really see each other but just shaking someone like that wont do much i guess thats why im using so many words because maybe you can shake a head with words too with hands and with words

look here this body my body its the same body the rented body of my parents this is it only a little changed the way bodies change when they resurface in the next generation do you see the similarity to the rented bodies and look here my hands they too are the same as the rented hands of my parents they are only one generation apart but the hands are the same they always come back only fashion and hairdos change but the bodies they always come back and the hands of these bodies they always come back do you know how the hands in your family are incredibly similar my hands look at them they are the same as my parents look at them im sure youve never seen such hands so close and with so much time we can practically smell each other right now so look these are my hands

i dont know whether you remember but it wont have escaped your attention why all these bodies are here why they were planted here from the country in which their parents were born maybe you dont know people forget the rented bodies started coming to germany in 1955 as work

migrants millions of others came but they were supposed to come stay for eight years and then go away again they had been invited here to germany by the german state of the federal republic of germany to help rebuild this bomb-chrushed country because the people wanted to live like before and needed hands to rebuild all that stuff and build even more and they simply lacked the hands for all this labor and yes planted you can put it that way sure not only plants can be planted elsewhere but humans too yes trust me its possible arent we basically all plants creatures are basically plants we need water like plants do and fresh air and a fixed place to thrive like plants do and when we have fresh air and a little quiet we will do great if we have these things we will be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and yes the bodies were planted here because they didnt just move here by themselves i mean they didnt just come here but they were rented some do say they were invited but thats not what people found here so it was certainly not an invitation they were simply rented the way you rent things they were brought here with the so called anwerbeabkommen which means recruitment agreement and planted here from the land they were born in they were taken up there together with their roots and replanted here with humans you need to take their roots just like you do with plants if you want to plant them away from the place theyve been born because without their routines and preferences and their language and all you cant plant them anywhere else thats what i consider their roots thats what you have to take or they cant take root elsewhere because a plant without roots is like a flower thats been plucked and then without water cant stand upright or live unsupported a plucked flower is as good as dead it only briefly retains its freshness but it is already dying as soon as it is plucked nor can you replant a plant as often as you want like once when it is still young and hasnt grown strong roots yet and then once again thats not really possible thats almost certain death i never heard of a tree thats been planted elsewhere as a while after it was fully grown how are you supposed to do that with its roots theyre awfully long then and deep inside the ground that would be a real piece of work and needed a lot of preparation and aftercare and thats not much different with people so we are all only just plants a little water some fresh air and a nice place to take root in peace and thats that

and i would like to take your hand actually we are so close close enough to touch we could even hold each others hands but we dont and actually i could touch your hand now and you could touch my hand but we dont we just stand like that as if there were a wall between us but there is no wall and what kind of wall would that be what manmade wall is really insurmountable there is no such thing insurmountable walls everything manmade can be unmade by man or you climb or jump over it thats another option with a ladder for example so you could jump over it and could hold my hand now if you wanted and i yours and we would touch such touching is often underestimated when i touch others i am reminded of my own humanity that i only consist of flesh and blood and of a heart that pumps to get my body running to warm it a small physical touch like that sometimes touches the soul i mean the soul wherever it is is not so far away from the body body and soul have a direct connection a kind of express connection or in this country you could imagine a highspeed train connection a train speeding at 300 km/h from one place to the next like lightning when something happens in the body the soul knows fast as lightning our synapses do an excellent job they are actually a few million times faster than an express shipping or a highspeed train maybe even a billion times and whenever something happens in the soul the body will know there is a bit of a delay sometimes but sometimes it is instantaneous what would happen if i touched your hand or if you were to touch mine or we simply were to touch each other and would recognize that we are only made of flesh and blood or from tissue and water if

you like i mean it is so easy of course we are both human beings but do you know how you sometimes forget that when you dont have that immediate connection to the other persons humanity and it is this connection that im talking about maybe it would be there if we touched but that doesnt happen there is no wall between us and yet there is a wall and no ladder seems long enough to climb over it

do you remember when the bodies were rented how this renting procedure happened how it came about how it was actually done they were going to rent them for 10 or 20 years and then then they were supposed to be gone back to where they came from and where they came from is where lots of other things came from things you enjoy things in your kitchen in every kitchen like spices pepper what kitchen doesnt have pepper so pepper do you like pepper you like a nicely seasoned steak dont you or a tasty salad dressing yes well thats where that pepper comes from it grows where the rented bodies come from it goes on a nice long journey too until it arrives in your and in my kitchen and so these bodies are rented now and what do they do in the 10 to 20 years that they run around rented here to make your life beautiful those bodies stand at the conveyor belt at 6 in the morning and do piecework until their backs and necks hurt until their shoulders hurt and they do that every day day in day out every day really every single day because they also work on holidays to put aside money and they also work sundays to put aside money which they take back to the land of pepper and they simply work all the time until their backs go to waste until their shoulders cannot move anymore until every move of their necks sends little jabs of pain down through the body and what do these bodies do when they are not standing at the conveyor belt for example before 6 and in the time after 2 pm end of shift they eat and sleep and what else could such a body do all that time maybe this body will look for a place make himself at home will look for a partner and does what you would call building a future for yourself and it will make plans many many plans to build a house plans to go on vacation plans to have children to send these children to school and to university this body does all these things you know this you know these things thats how you do it so you know everybody knows you live have your daily routine make plans for the future imagine your future make plans that you adjust by and by to the circumstances to the people you are dealing with you adjust yourself you adjust your plans you adjust the calculations inside your head you change your plans according to the circumstances you have a plan to save money for example and buy a house back home but then you meet the love of your life two blocks down and you marry then you make friends and you still love your old friends just like before but the new ones as well and which ones are more important who can make that decision and so you just stay where you are and adjust your plans you dream for example of a house back home with a garden and olive trees and mandarin trees and maybe even with one or two pepper plants and at some point you see in your dream a house on a small hill with an ivy bush on the walls and an apple tree in the garden and the name of the street then is not bekir sokak but berndstraße but by and large it is the same because in that house whether it is there or there still live the people you love and it is always a little walk over to your friends or a little way by car but otherwise it is by and large the same plans slowly change inside your head almost imperceptibly because you dont know it until you at some point see a house in your dreams that is very clearly made of bricks and standing on berndstraße with a vine or many vines of ivy climbing up the walls

and then they came here those bodies at the employment office my mother filled out the forms at

that office in turkey because thats where they got hired thats how far the application forms went at the german employment center here the one we know here thats where the rental procedure started she went to the office together with my aunt and there they first waited with the others who all looked like they had come for the same application and back then they did not know yet what kind of things their hands that they used to fill in these forms would be doing and what kind of a long journey was ahead of them

and at the office my mother not only signed a paper or filled out an application do you know what your heart does when you take such a step it just beats faster it races so damn fast the thyroid spills all kinds of hormones giving you a queasy feeling in your stomach and you get doubts and panic and then when you have stepped out from the office and the next day has come that feeling subsides only now and then the queasy feeling returns when you think of the office and what happened there that you submitted the paper with your signature and then you wait and think of the meaning of your signature on that paper until the day comes that my mother received her approval or the message because it can hardly have been hard to be accepted to that program it was a pretty sure bet but i can imagine that there might have been age restrictions and you had to be healthy my mother for example had to delay her immigration to germany the start of a new period in her life due to her high blood pressure but only for a few days maybe she was simply terribly excited at the medical exam you know because she didnt do that at her place of residence but in istanbul she had to travel there to take the plane or the train from there and the group she was supposed to travel with left by train a few days before she did without her she sat in istanbul a city she didnt know waiting for her heart to calm down and she didnt even know whether her heart would calm down and whether she would even be able to take that trip or whether she maybe was not at the beginning of a new period in her life but simply had to go back home the home which she thought she would only see again in a few years and what may be going on in your head then you are looking forward and are afraid of the trip and the new place youre traveling to and then maybe none of it happens because your heart wont calm down

the confidence that people had in this affair the trust that they put in the hands of the people inviting them here
you know to make such a step you need to trust the people you are going to meet you need to trust the place the people in it its habits its customs to treat you well to find yourself in good hands believe that you put your trust in good hands that the people inviting you will be good to you you have this trust in the people this entire affair this working situation and that you will remain unscathed throughout unscathed physically and psychologically because who goes places where you cant be safe or where you expect to be hurt you dont go there except when you can trust this place to ensure your integrity for these people may have come from poverty but they all had family they were not completely desperate or at the end of their wits they wouldn’t have passed the medical exam then anyway and gotten a place in the program they were able to come because they were in good shape physically and mentally people like that dont just go anywhere in the world where they expect to be hurt they had hopes confidence and those were the things they had packed

and their hands make so much these hands hands and hands and so many hands of the parents their friends and cousins and sisters and brothers they work untiringly fulfilling the tasks they are given everything that is handed to them they process they are the hands and arms that build

everything you see you see they are what everybody lives in even this space we are in where we are standing now these hands are what everybody moves around in what everybody sits on and what everybody sleeps on and what everybody drives to work with when you sit in your car seat when you feel the fabric on your skin the fabric the material of the seat that has been made by these hands look here do you see the hands look at my hands that is what they looked like and when you touch the steering wheel and turn it touch it with your fingers you touch their work they made that wheel they installed it right there when you sit your friends and family down in your new car and go on a tour with them or go shopping in your car or take your kids to kindergarten then these hands will drive you there to your destinations in every-day life on vacation it is into these hands that you put your life they carry everybody and make everything everybody needs and they have been doing it for a very long time since 1961 to be precise and i understand the embarrassment of it somehow it is in these hands and these bodies that are still around here everywhere and continue to be here and make simply everything and to acknowledge or express that neediness i understand that that comes with great shame who wants to be so needy and my parents and their entire generation who came here and now my generation we are practically the physical incarnation of this neediness and when you see that day in day out this embarrassment pierces right through your eyes and even when you close your eyes as hard as you can the pupils will be pierced both of them and through the closed eyelids that is how strong that stab is do you know how some plants arm themselves with spikes not to be plucked or trampled on or eaten that is how thick the spikes are piercing everything and when i think of this shame and all the things it does to you and to me my words break my language my words break i cannot speak my words are broken they often break dont come out in the first place they do not exist they do not enter the world they dont make it into the world they dont fall into that space called world they simply dont fall not from my lips out of my mouth they dont roll off my tongue they get stuck there in my throat in my body they are stuck in the channels of my brain they are still stuck there in their primal form in their nonverbal primal form as thoughts ideas fleeting glimpses of an idea that cant even form in the first place because it doesnt find the words because it remains an idea a vague image of something

with her hands my mother pressed all kinds of small metal parts stainless silverware knives forks spoons scissors mostly knives and scissors these fine clippers you know thats what she pressed they are shipped worldwide even today auto parts she pressed parts for car ventilation and round bent metal you cant tell what its for but she pressed that too at these massive machines that made the ground shake and she baked cookies who knows maybe your parents and grandparents have even eaten these cookies maybe even daily cookie cookie myum yummy i love cookies i imagine my mother having baked huge amounts of cookies every day covered with warm molten chocolate mmmyum

and my father built everything with his hands and his brother had built here with his hands even before my father built here with his hands these homes for example look there there and there everywhere around us the houses my father and his brother my uncle built with their hands their arms their legs and their backs on which they carried cement into the buildings and carried it up one floor after the other 50 kilograms per cement bag 50 kilos per bag how many bags does it take for one house a small one for example how are they carried there and on whose backs the bags are smaller now only 25 kilos almost small enough for a person like me to carry so i could almost carry such a bag and i think that i am pretty strong for a woman but my back or my arms

may just be able to handle 25 kilos once or twice or three times a day but only for a few meters and thats it then and if i had to carry them up to the second third fourth floor or higher id have just about enough with one 25 kilo bag and after that id need to go on vacation

how heavy will a 25 kilo cement bag be like a 6 or 7 year old child maybe that should be about right but to carry a child up to the fourth floor is different id have the body tension that makes it easier and it would hold on to me i suppose but a bag of cement is uncomfortable to carry so it has to be on the back and you carry a child up to the fourth floor for example and put it in its little bed and then it sleeps and you may get ready for bed too but such a cement bag doesnt get you very far in building a house there will be maybe hundreds more to follow you really need a vacation after that for the rest of your life i would think wouldnt you but my father and my uncle did that as long as i can remember until their backs couldnt take it anymore

and do you see how the hands work how they slave away on and on how their muscles move how they strain to move how they pull and do and carry and drag and how their tendons stretch how they overstretch and work themselves raw how they keep the pain ointment always handy do you see the hands go to waste do you see the bodies go to waste do you see the skin rasped off the bodies standing at the conveyor belt doing piecework how raw they are worn raw at the levers and switches at the machines the work scrapes life off them the work scraping life off them in layers first the skin then the muscles then the bones the injuries from work penetrate right through to the bones the movements at the conveyor belt break their way into their bodies and through the layers of their bodies through the skin the muscles the bones and into the marrow of the bones that is how deep the movements of the belt break through down to the depths of their bodies they work themselves raw they do it for your pursuit of prosperity and your pursuit of luxury that luxury that eternal desire for luxury and abundance who does not have that desire to live in abundance of everything to have so much that you never need to worry about a thing the dream of unending luxury bathing and swimming in luxury and standing in a waterfall of luxury beating down and dropping warmly on the skin and dropping off the shoulders a pleasant tickle at the feet a bubble bath of luxury in which you feel yourself floating on clouds from which nothing will carry you away ever again from which nothing can tear you away which will simply be forever you know forever in all eternity until you are no more and much further even just on and on so steadily that it even plays a trick on time it even survives time and exists longer than time itself longer than the universe and all the stars in it and longer even than god himself a jet of water without beginning or end its existence threatened by nothing and nobody it is simply eternal

i dont know whether you ever worked at a factory do you know those machines the smells the sounds its a world of its own and in this world in the middle of it all i see my mother standing at the conveyor belt and she has pushed her shirt up to her elbows and the elbows are uncovered that is how far the wounds go exactly to where she pushes up her shirt every day the blades of the knives find her skin the blades always land on her skin no matter how careful she is she watches the blades like crazy and keeps them away from herself from her skin as good as she can but they find their way to her skin again and again and blood on her fingertips and until she has learnt it she has cut her hands and got to know the blood of a human being from the various body parts and skin layers and she shows me and she teaches me and i remember with her what her blood looks like on her hand what her blood looks like inside her top skin layer what her blood

looks like under the fat layer of her arm how she learns about the various states of her blood from bright red to dark red from liquid like water to thick like plum jam oozing like a foam bubble slowly growing from jam

during their journey these hands touch metal hard soft metal iron steel aluminum all forms of metal you can imagine and even more forms than one person will know in long and short sheets thick sheets thin sheets in rods in forms they are pressed they pass through the hands all forms pass through their hands and are cut sliced bored and pressed in all imaginable forms as are required for the beautiful products we all need and they are assembled to cars and machines and often to weapons too

we chat them away out of sight out of mind we chat them away make them disappear make the hands disappear and let the bodies disappear pretend that they had never been there would never be there again we look away look only at the products take them for granted believe that they magically materialize in faraway worlds that are so far away that they have nothing to do with the here and now that they are so far away that they are hardly real and that the products materialize as if by magic and reach shops and the internet they are not produced you click them into existence and how much work can be in a thing that arrives at your door with one click

and sometimes i scan your face with my eyes see what is going on in that face i scan this face with my eyes your face in search for i dont know what

and at some point they did not like the hands anymore and at some point they were not fashionable enough anymore and did not fit the luxury all around or they were something that reminded too much of this feeling of shame that at some point had pierced you so or perhaps the hands were never anything anybody liked and were always meant to be gone out of sight out of mind gone like they never existed they were meant to work fast do one piecework shift after the other and then quickly disappear as if they had never existed and then these bodies that had slaved are attacked with blows with spit with fire and with bullets and the blows the spit the fire and the bullets they were meant to destroy the bodies when you look back to this country in the 90ies look back to recent years the fire comes rushing at you it hits you in the face but even without the fire they hit the bodies with their words the words are invisible but they are just as powerful as the fire do you know the kind of power i mean

and they put their words right here see where they put their words let them beat down and hit throw them down slam them and beat them see it right there here between my eyes is the spot its right here on my temple right here on my forehead in the middle of my forehead is that place do you see it right here on my arm on my arm joint and i cannot move my arm anymore i am so raw on my legs on my feet on my knees on my hip on my buttocks on my back my shoulder my head on my eyes between my eyes on my eyes i cant open my eyes anymore i cant smell anymore my nose is smashed and i cant hear anymore my ears are smashed and i cant speak anymore my mouth is clotted with blood and my mouth is full of blood and the organs in my body are so sore from the blows you see where the blows hit me sore i get and sore i am and my organs all break down all of me breaks down and is sore and destroyed

and there are so many weapons there are words like weapons there are fist blows and bats and

clubs and pistols and there is fire this fire is a very special a concealed weapon and there is something concealed about an attack with fire you see a certain secrecy an attacker can hide behind fire always leaves room for doubt whether it might not have been an accident so aggressors are able to veil their actions and they did try to conceal their actions with their arson attacks in the 90s their attacks were concealed and now with the attacks in halle and hanau even that attempt is gone you understand they dont even keep up appearances and shoot with guns and bullets

fire as a weapon is a category of its own fire really is something special an incredible thing an incredible something it is not of anything no it consists of devouring and destroying something and that is incredible it only exists in destruction it is alive because it destroys without destruction there would be no fire dont you agree that its incredible how extraordinary fire is as a weapon and what happens when fire becomes a weapon when not a stick or a pistol or a fist is the weapon but fire

and then at some point there is this list

and i read this list and take this list into my hand and read the names on it the names that accumulated collected become a list that by their number make up a list i take this list into my hand take the names into my hand between both hands hold it the names are in my hand and i see them with my eyes look at them the names i let my eyes my pupils pass over them up and down left and right i hold them in my hand let my eyes get used to them this sight of the names that become a list browse that list browsing and passing with my pupils over the numbers the dates the facts passing back and forth with my pupils over the names the letters that become names getting used to them passing over the numbers that become ages over the letters that become places names of places over the numbers that become years places names ages how many years had a person lived at this and that time how many years had a person already seen for how many years had a person already laughed and cried and for how many had a person known this world for example the list says 26 march 1998 saalfeld/saale jana georgi 14 so jana had known this world for 14 years the world we live in not mars or something but simply this world we live in this planet earth jana had had 14 years of experience here on earth she had laughed and cried built and broken friendships had hoped and worried and was glad and had partied and erred and gotten lost and eaten and drunken slept celebrated teenage birthdays drunken coke eaten black forest cake and so forth and then on 26 march 1998 it ended she didnt get any day older after that she remained and will always remain 14 years old that was decided on 26 march 1998 in saalfeld/saale

i read the names and put them on my tongue rivka meir rosa arie david siegfried eliakim martin anka anton neset karl delfin raul rudi celalettin nguyen do gabriele robert axel markus ignatz ilona franz angela errol ernst beate shlomo frida and pronounce their letters f r i d a and pronounce their sounds i take a breath and say them with my breath i suck the air in with my lung and make it my breath which i exhale breathing with it the letters s i e g f r i e d the sounds of a name e l i a k i m your name eliakim georg pfau your name jana georgi and your name jana gundula klein and your name jana lange your name arthur lampel your name jeremiah duggan your name patricia wright your name christelle makodila nsimba and yours legrand makodila mbongo and yours jean-daniel makodila kosi 3 years old on 18 january 1996 in lübeck his

experience on this planet was terminated i speak my lung breathing in air breathing out breath my mouth my lips my throat helping working together becoming one movement that makes your name for that world out there outside of me your name passing through me through my body saying it out loud let us say the names together let them pass through our bodies the list is long enough to practice it is long enough and will still become longer and i graze the sheets with the names on them and i feel their names these almost tactile objects that are their names their age the place they died the day they died these letters and figures summarizing their lives in short in shortest facts

and this is how the list starts

22 june 1966 dorfen andreas ostermeier 63

arson attack on the senior citizens home of the isrealite community in munich
13 february 1970 munich rivka regina becher 59
13 february 1970 munich meir max blum 71
13 february 1970 munich rosa drucker 59
13 february 1970 munich arie leib leopold gimpel 50
13 february 1970 munich david jakubovicz 60
13 february 1970 munich siegfried offenbacher 71
13 february 1970 munich eliakim georg pfau 63

29 august 1970 konstanz martin katschker 17
5 november 1972 niederthann anka denisov 18
31 may 1973 heidelberg anton lehmann 53
21 may 1974 norderstedt neset danis 30
8 may 1979 hagen karl mettbach 53
12 august 1979 merseburg delfin guerra 18
12 august 1979 merseburg raul garcia paret 21
24 december 1979 berlin rudi dutschke 39
5 january 1980 berlin celalettin kesim 36

assassination of hamburg-billbrook
23 august 1980 hamburg-billbrook nguyen ngoc chau 22
25 august 1980 hamburg-billbrook do anh lan 18

oktoberfest attack
26 september 1980 munich gabriele deutsch 17
26 september 1980 munich robert gmeinwieser 17
26 september 1980 munich axel hirsch 23
26 september 1980 munich markus hölzl 44
26 september 1980 munich paul lux 52
26 september 1980 munich ignatz platzer 6
26 september 1980 munich ilona platzer 8
26 september 1980 munich franz schiele 33
26 september 1980 munich angela schüttrigkeit 39

26 september 1980 munich errol vere-hodge 25
26 september 1980 munich ernst vestner 30
26 september 1980 munich beate werner 11

erlangen double murder
19 december 1980 erlangen shlomo lewin 69
19 december 1980 erlangen frida poeschke 57

1 january 1981 gündelbach sydi battal koparan 44/45
29 may 1981 hamburg johannes bügner 26
may 1982 hanover-garbsen indian man
22 june 1982 norderstedt tevfik gürel 26

nuremberg disco murders
24 june 1982 nuremberg william schenck 24
24 june 1982 nuremberg rufus surles 27
24 june 1982 nuremberg mohamed ehap 21

17 october 1982 hamburg adrian maleika 16
27 april 1984 munich corinna tartarotti 20

arson attack in duisburg-wanheimerort 1984
26 august 1984 duisburg döndü satir 40
26 august 1984 duisburg songül satir 4
26 august 1984 duisburg ümit satir 5
26 august 1984 duisburg cigdem satir 7
26 august 1984 duisburg zeliha turhan 18
26 august 1984 duisburg rasim turhan 15
26 august 1984 duisburg tarik turhan 50 days

25 september 1984 berlin fatma e.
24 july 1985 hamburg-langenhorn mehmet kaymakçı 29
24 december 1985 hamburg-hohenfelde ramazan avci 26
14 january 1986 hanover niels krückeberg 19
30 june 1986 borne antonio manuelo diogo 23
3 february 1987 hanover gerd-roger bornemann 17
19 august 1987 tübingen kiomars javadi 21
19 september 1987 stassfurt carlos conceicao 18

schwandorf arson attack
17 december 1988 schwandorf osman can 50
17 december 1988 schwandorf fatma can 43
17 december 1988 schwandorf mehmet can 12
17 december 1988 schwandorf jürgen hübener 47

12 may 1989 berlin ufuk şahin 24

27 july 1989 gelsenkirchen homeless man
august 1989 lüneburg birgit meier 41
1989 essen frank r. 22
6 march 1990 berlin mahmud azhar 40
1 july 1990 erfurt heinz mädel 58
7 october 1990 lübbenau andrzej fratczak 36
21 october 1990 ludwigsburg eberhard arnold 23
17 november 1990 kempten ercan s. 5
6 december 1990 eberswalde amadeu antonio 28
11 december 1990 berlin-lichtenberg klaus-dieter reichert 24
28 december 1990 hachenburg nihat yusufoğlu 17
1 january 1991 rosdorf alexander selchow 21
6 january 1991 flensburg lothar fischer 31
24 february 1991 delitzsch man from afghanistan 31
6 april 1991 dresden jorge gomondai 28
13 april 1991 rathenow a. rustanow
1 june 1991 leipzig gerhard sch. 43
4 juny 1991 kästorf (gifhorn) helmut leja 39
16 june 1991 friedrichshafen agostinho comboio 34
7. juli 1991 gelnhausen jonny braun 54
16 september 1991 schwedt wolfgang auch 28
19 september 1991 saarlouis samuel kofi yeboah 27
13 november 1991 berlin-charlottenburg mete ekşi 19
3 december 1991 hohenselchow gerd himmstädt 30
10 december 1991 munich romanian man
12 december 1991 meuro timo kählke 29
1991 berlin-neukölln yugoslavian man
5 january 1992 klein-mutz near gransee ingo ludwig 18
5 january 1992 augsburg nigerian man
11 january 1992 hanover male refugee

arson attack in lampertheim
31 january 1992 lampertheim man from sri lanka 29
31 january 1992 lampertheim woman from sri lanka 31
31 january 1992 lampertheim child from sri lanka 1

23 february 1992 frankfurt am main blanka zmigrod 68
4 march 1992 gifhorn matthias knabe 23
6 march 1992 reilingen turkish man
11 march 1992 schwedt melanie harke 13
15 march 1992 saal dragomir christinel 18
19 march 1992 flensburg ingo finnern 31
22 march 1992 buxtehude gustav schneeclaus 53
4 april 1992 hörstel erich bosse 46
24 april 1992 berlin-marzahn nguyễn văn tú 29
25 april 1992 werder an der havel peter konrad 31

11 may 1992 magdeburg torsten lamprecht 23
29 june 1992 nadrensee grigore velcu
29 june 1992 nadrensee eudache calderar
1 july 1992 neuruppin emil wendtland 50
8 july 1992 ostfildern-kemnat sadri berisha 56
1 august 1992 bad breisig dieter klaus klein 49
3 august 1992 stotternheim ireneusz szyderski 24
24 august 1992 koblenz frank bönisch 35
29 august 1992 berlin vietnamese man 29
5 september 1992 berlin-charlottenburg günter schwannecke 58
19 october 1992 berlin peruvian man 37
23 october 1992 frankfurt an der oder nigerian man
24 october 1992 geierswalde waltraud scheffler 44
november 1992 königs wusterhausen antifashist man
november 1992 königs wusterhausen antifashist man
7 november 1992 lehnin rolf schulze 52
13 november 1992 wuppertal karl-hans rohn 53
21 november 1992 berlin-friedrichshain silvio meier 27
21 november 1992 wülfrath alfred salomon 92

mölln murders
23 november 1992 mölln bahide arslan 51
23 november 1992 mölln yeliz arslan 10
23 november 1992 mölln ayşe yılmaz 14

6 december 1992 jänschwalde kroatian man
15 december 1992 weidenau (siegen) bruno kappi 55
15 december 1992 giessen man
17 december 1992 berlin-mitte gamal hegab 35
18 december 1992 oranienburg hans-jochen lommatzsch 55
27 december 1992 meerbusch sahin calisir 20
7 january 1993 wetzlar homeless man
15 january 1993 arnstadt karl sidon 45
22 january 1993 stassfurt romanian man 21
23 january 1993 freiburg kerstin winter 24
24 january 1993 schlotheim mario jödecke 23
3 february 1992 suhl olaf h.
22 february 1993 hangelsberg mabiala mavinga
25 february 1993 hoyerswerda mike zerna 22
9 march 1993 mülheim/ruhr mustafa demiral 56
12 march 1993 uelzen hans-peter zarse 18
29 march 1993 bad segeberg friedrich massling 58
27 april 1993 obhausen matthias lüders 23
29 april 1993 sondershausen sandro beyer 15
1 may 1993 berlin yilma wondwossen b. 31
20 may 1993 coburg man

21 may 1993 göttingen german soldier 20
26 may 1993 waldeck (mittenwalde) jeff dominiak 25

solingen assassination
29 may 1993 solingen gürsün ince 27
29 may 1993 solingen hatice genç 18
29 may 1993 solingen hülya genç 9
29 may 1993 solingen saime genç 4
29 may 1993 solingen gülüstan öztürk 12

june 1993 oranienburg bernd z. 29
5 june 1993 fürstenwalde horst hennersdorf 37
10 june 1993 dresden mozambican

fire in shelter for homeless and foreigners siegburg
15 june 1993 siegburg female tenant 33
15 june 1993 siegburg female tenant 50
15 june 1993 siegburg male tenant 42
15 june 1993 siegburg girl 10
15 june 1993 siegburg boy 12

17 june 1993 dülmen abdi atalan 41
20 june 1993 berlin-tempelhof hung va quang 26
21 june 1993 berlin-kreuzberg angela s. 29
21 june 1993 berlin-kreuzberg dario s. 2
28 june mühlhausen romanian man 26
16 july 1993 marl homeless man 33
28 july 1993 strausberg hans-georg jakobson 35
1 august 1993 uelzen male student 16
19 september 1993 werneuchen bei bernau horst t. 51
october 1993 marl homeless man 33
5 october 1993 bad wildungen man from sri lanka
5 october 1993 bad wildungen german woman
5 october 1993 bad wildungen child
10 october 1993 dusseldorf homeless turkish man
7 december 1993 hamburg-buchholz bakary singateh (kolong jamba) 19
25 december 1993 kaltenkirchen turkish man
26 january 1994 cologne jasminka jovanović 12
26 january 1994 cologne raina jovanović 62
1 february 1994 german cargo ship man from zaire
3 february 1994 berlin horst scharlach 60
4 february 1994 berlin-weißensee wolfgang o. 46
11 february 1994 hamburg-neugraben homeless man
18 february 1994 darmstadt ali bayram 50

stuttgart arson attack

16 march 1994 stuttgart-mitte ante b. 60
16 march 1994 stuttgart ljuba b. 55
16 march 1994 stuttgart zuzanna m. 57
16 march 1994 stuttgart athina s. 24
16 march 1994 stuttgart kristina s. 2
16 march 1994 stuttgart nebahat s. 27
16 march 1994 stuttgart aynül s. 4
20 april 1994 gieboldehausen albanian man 40
29 april 1994 göttingen turkish woman
5 may 1994 quedlinburg eberhart tennstedt 43
28 may 1994 leipzig klaus r. 43
15 june 1994 kyritz romanian man 19
22 june 1994 bochum esam chandin 9
june 1994 bochum mohamed badaoui
1 july 1994 hanover halim dener 17
20 july 1994 berlin-lichtenberg vietnamese man
23 july 1994 berlin-reinickendorf beate fischer 32
26 july 1994 berlin jan wnenczak 45
3 august 1994 leipzig vietnamese man 33
6 august 1994 velten gunter marx 42
27 august 1994 berlin homeless man 43
30 august 1994 frankfurt am main kola bankole 30
27 september 1994 magdeburg farid boukhit 30
28 september 1994 herford burkujie haliti 23
28 september 1994 herford navgim haliti 11
30 september 1994 völklingen male refugee
30 september 1994 völklingen male refugee
14 oktober 1994 paderborn alexandra rousi 62
6 november 1994 rotenburg an der fulda piotr kania 18
20 november 1994 zittau michael gäbler 18
24 december sengental-reichertshofen turkish man 38
24 december sengental-reichertshofen turkish child 5
4 january 1995 zell kosovar woman 2
4 january 1995 zell kosovar woman 4
5 february 1995 hennigsdorf guido zeidler 20

arson attack on container home in wedemark-mellendorf
8 january 1995 wedemark-mellendorf serbian woman
8 january 1995 wedemark-mellendorf serbian child
8 january 1995 wedemark-mellendorf serbian child
8 january 1995 wedemark-mellendorf serbian child

5 february velbert horst pulter 65
5 february 1995 hennigsdorf guido zeidler 20
4 june 1995 hohenstein-ernstthal peter t. 24
16 july 1995 altena dagmar kohlmann 25

29 august 1995 ulm man from ghana
29 august 1995 ulm man from chad
5 september 1995 lübeck turkish woman
5 september lübeck german man
7 september 1995 amberg klaus peter beer 48
15 october 1995 karlsruhe turkish man
15 october 1995 karlsruhe turkish man
15 october 1995 karlsruhe turkish man
november 1995 dresden michael silbermann 22
november 1995 dresden sven silbermann 24
17 december 1995 leipzig-großzschocher gerhard helmut b. 19
18 december 1995 oelde sanjib kumar shrestha 21
22 december 1995 grimma mario l. 15
24 december 1995 foreigners' asylum bergkamen child
24 december 1995 foreigners' asylum bergkamen child
24 december 1995 foreigners' asylum bergkamen child
30 december 1995 leipzig-grünau horst k. 43
1995 duisburg-friemersheim african man
1995 emmerich african man

lübeck arson attack
18 january 1996 lübeck monica maiamba bunga 27
18 january 1996 lübeck nsuzana bunga 7
18 january 1996 lübeck françoise makodila landu 32
18 january 1996 lübeck miya makodila 14
18 january 1996 lübeck christine makodila 17
18 january 1996 lübeck christelle makodila nsimba 8
18 january 1996 lübeck legrand makodila mbongo 5
18 january 1996 lübeck jean-daniel makodila kosi 3
18 january 1996 lübeck rabia el omari 17
18 january 1996 lübeck sylvio bruno comlan amoussou 27

3 february 1996 bergisch gladbach patricia wright 23
20 february 1996 brandenburg an der havel sven beuter 23
7 march 1996 bremen reinhard wojciechowski 47
15 march 1996 dorsten-rhade martin kemming 26
8 may 1996 leipzig bernd grigol 43
june 1996 lübeck male student
13 july 1996 wolgast boris morawek 26
19 july 1996 eppingen werner weickum 44
1 august 1996 eisenhüttenstadt andreas götz 36
23 october 1996 leipzig achmed bachir 30
1996 menden-lendrigsen ukrainian man 36
1 january 1997 greifswald horst d. 57
24 january 1997 magdeburg homeless man
8 february 1997 magdeburg frank böttcher 17

13 february 1997 caputh antonio melis 37
23 february 1997 autobahn rest stop roseburg/hornbek stefan grage 33
17 april 1997 berlin-treptow olaf schmidke 26
17 april 1997 berlin-treptow chris danneil 31
22 april 1997 sassnitz horst gens 50
22 april 1997 fredersdorf-vogelsdorf phan van toan 42
8 may 1997 königs wusterhausen augustin blotzki 59
june 1997 leipzig male algerian refugee 40
4 june 1997 friedrichshafen/lake constance bektas heval 26
23 august 1997 potzlow male social worker 45
4 september 1997 nordhausen rolf baginski 55
23 september 1997 cottbus mathias scheydt 39
27 september 1997 cottbus georg jürgen uhl 49
17 october 1997 bochum josef anton gera 59
17 november 1997 anklam horst meyer 61
26 march 1998 saalfeld/saale jana georgi 14
30 august 1998 angermünde ernst fisk 59
23 december 1998 homeless shelter berlin-schöneberg homeless man
29 december 1998 markkleeberg-gaschwitz nuno lourenço 49
february 1999 bestensee-pätz male shelter tenant
february 1999 bestensee-pätz male shelter tenant
13 february 1999 guben farid guendoul 28
17 march 1999 duisburg-walsum egon effertz 58
28 may 1999 frankfurt am main aamir ageeb 31
1 july 1999 köln erol ispir 33
10 august 1999 eschede peter deutschmann 44
15 august 1999 kolbermoor carlos fernando 35
3 october 1999 hohenstein-ernstthal patrick thürmer 17
6 october 1999 berlin-lichtenberg kurt schneider 38
8 october 1999 löbejün hans-werner gärtner 37

bad reichenhall rampage
1 november 1999 bad reichenhall karl-heinz lietz 54
1 november 1999 bad reichenhall daniela peyerl 18
1 november 1999 bad reichenhall horst zillenbiller 60
1 november 1999 bad reichenhall ruth zillenbiller 59

29 december 1999 halle-neustadt jörg danek 38/39
31 january 2000 weißwasser bernd schmidt 52
17 march 2000 berlin-wedding jugosloven (slovo) ignjatovic 51
29 april 2000 halberstadt helmut sackers 60
24 may 2000 berlin-buch dieter eich 60
31 may 2000 eberswalde falko lüdtke 22
14 june 2000 dessau alberto adriano 39

dortmund and waltrop police murders

14 june 2000 dortmund thomas goretzky 35
14 june 2000 waltrop yvonne hachtkemper 34
14 june 2000 waltrop matthias larisch von woitowitz 34

24 june 2000 greifswald klaus-dieter gerecke 47
9 july 2000 wismar jürgen seifert 52
24 july 2000 ahlbeck norbert plath 51
27 july 2000 düsseldorf-wehrhahn unborn child
15 august 2000 greifswald jana gundula klein 24
11 september 2000 nuremberg enver şimşek 38
13 september 2000 schleswig malte lerch 45
5 october 2000 freiberg homeless man
8 october 2000 neu-isenburg aysel özer 22
8 october 2000 neu-isenburg seydi vakkas özer 47
4 november 2000 belzig belaid baylal 42
25 november 2000 greifswald eckhardt rütz 42
march 2001 grimmen fred blank 51
28 march 2001 milzau willi worg 38
22 april 2001 jarmen mohammed belhadj 31
24 may 2001 bad blankenburg axel urbanietz 27
13 june 2001 nuremberg abdurrahim özüdoğru 49
27 june 2001 hamburg-bahrenfeld süleyman taşköprü 31
6 july 2001 witten frank h. 33
9 august 2001 wittenberge klaus-dieter harns 61
9 august 2001 dahlewitz dieter manzke 61
17 august 2001 fulda dorit botts 54
29 august 2001 münchen habil kılıç 38
9 september 2001 bräunlingen arthur lampel 18
9 september 2001 walow-strietfeld yvonne polzin 31
5 november 2001 berlin-hellersdorf ingo binsch 36
15 may 2002 neubrandenburg klaus-dieter lehmann 19
23 may 2002 wittstock kajrat batesov 24
1 june 2002 neu mahlisch ronald masch 29
30 june 2002 wurzen christa g. 64
13 july 2002 potzlow marinus schöberl 16
10 august 2002 sulzbach ahmet sarlak 19
27 november 2002 altdorf zygmunt rudnicha 53
27 december 2002 stralsund wolfgang h. 35
25 january 2003 erfurt hartmut balzke 48
21 march 2003 naumburg andreas oertel 40
27 march 2003 wiesbaden jeremiah duggan 22
29 march 2003 frankfurt (oder) enrico schreiber 25
22 april 2003 riesa günter t. 35
10 july 2003 scharnebeck gerhard fischhöder 49
4 october 2003 leipzig thomas k. 16

overath murders
7 october 2003 overath hartmut nickel 61
7 october 2003 overath alja nickel 26
7 october 2003 overath mechthild bucksteeg 53

kandel (palatinate) arson attack
6 december 2003 kandel petros c. 22
6 december 2003 stefanos c. 23

heidenheim disco murders
19 december 2003 heidenheim viktor filimonov 15
19 december 2003 heidenheim waldemar ickert 16
19 december 2003 heidenheim aleksander schleicher 17

20 january 2004 gera/bieblach-ost oleg valger 27
31 january 2004 burg martin görges 46
25 february 2004 rostock mehmet turgut 25
5 june 2004 güsten edgar r. 47
january 2005 stuttgart disabled homeless man
18 february 2005 magdeburg homeless man 51
28 march 2005 dortmund thomas schulz 32
9 june 2005 nuremberg ismail yaşar 50
15 june 2005 munich theodoros boulgarides 41
1/3 july 2005 essen homeless man 44
26 november 2005 bad buchau tim maier 20
1 march 2006 rheda-wiedenbrück fevzi ufuk 68
4 april 2006 dortmund mehmet kubaşık 39
6 april 2006 kassel halit yozgat 21
6 may 2006 plattling andreas pietrzak 41
10 july 2006 cottbus jürgen g. 51
september 2006 frankfurt (oder) hans-jürgen sch. 56
1 january 2007 wismar andreas f. 30
25 april 2007 heilbronn michèle kiesewetter 22
14 july 2007 brinjahe m. s. 17
24 july 2007 blankenburg (harz) homeless man 59
7 september 2007 hanover jenisa muja 8
7 october 2007 frankfurt (oder) holger urbaniak 49

residential building fire in ludwigshafen on rhine
3 february 2008 ludwigshafen ilyas calar 2
3 february 2008 ludwigshafen kennan kaplan 2
3 february 2008 ludwigshafen kamil kaplan 3
3 february 2008 ludwigshafen karanfil kaplan 4
3 february 2008 ludwigshafen dilara kaplan 11
3 february 2008 ludwigshafen döne kaplan 21
3 february 2008 ludwigshafen hülya kaplan 31

3 february 2008 ludwigshafen medine kaplan 48
3 february 2008 ludwigshafen belma özkapli 22

20 february 2008 leer bianca b. 27
26 april 2008 memmingen peter siebert 40
22 july 2008 templin bernd köhler 55
1 august 2008 dessau hans-joachim sbrzesny 50
6 august 2008 berlin ngyuyen tan dung 19
16 august 2008 magdeburg rick langenstein 20
24 august 2008 bernburg marcel wisser 18
6 september 2008 leipzig karl-heinz teichmann 59
17 january 2009 ilmenau lars r. 28
1 july 2009 dresden marwa el-sherbini 31
3/4 october 2009 limburg andy schubert 45
14 may 2010 hemer sven m. 27
22 may 2010 kamp-lintfort klaus b. 51
24 october 2010 leipzig kamal kilade 19
9 march 2011 wiesbaden kestutis v.
27 march 2011 neuss duy-doan pham 59
1 june 2011 oschatz andré kleinau 50
4 october 2011 laichingen mühittin l. 44
5 april 2012 berlin-neukölln burak bektaş 22
17 june 2012 suhl klaus-peter kühn 59
30 september 2012 butzow karl heinz lieckfeldt 59
27 october 2012 hanover andrea b. 44
17 july 2013 kaufbeuren konstantin moljanov 34
24 january 2014 mönchengladbach-rheindahlen dorothea s.
14 march 2014 herford dano m. 5
23 october 2014 limburg charles werabe 55
20 september 2015 berlin luke holland 31
1 february 2016 berlin-charlottenburg jim reeves 47

munich attack 2016
22 july 2016 munich sevda dag 45
22 july 2016 munich hüseyin dayicik/chousein daitzik 17
22 july 2016 munich selcuk kilic 15
22 july 2016 munich giuliano josef kollmann 19
22 july 2016 munich can leyla 15
22 july 2016 munich janos roberto rafael 15
22 july 2016 munich armela segashi 14
22 july 2016 munich sabine sulaj 14
22 july 2016 munich dijamant zabergja 20

10 september 2016 waldbröl klaus b. 40
20 september 2016 berlin-lichtenberg eugeniu botnari 34

20 october 2016 georgensgmünd daniel ernst 32
13 november 2016 cologne homeless man 29
december 2016 gersthofen beate n. 49
december 2016 gersthofen elke w. 50
1 march 2017 döbeln ruth k. 85
18 april 2017 cottbus shaden m. 22
8 may 2017 homburg/saar-schwarzenacker ramona sorce 42
23 september 2017 köln atilla özer
8 december 2017 katlenburg-lindau christian sonnemann 37
5 february 2018 plauen german woman 22
5 february 2018 plauen german man 25
1 april 2018 bergisch-gladbach bilal a. 30
17 april 2018 neunkirchen-wiebelskirchen philipp w. 38
18 april 2018 aue (saxony) christopher w. 27
26 april 2019 hamburg-eppendorf william tonou-mbobda 34
2 june 2019 istha walter lübcke 65
20 july 2019 erfurt man 32

halle (saale) attack 2019
9 october 2019 halle (saale) jana lange 40
9 october 2019 halle (saale) kevin schwarze 20

hanau attack 2020
19 february 2020 hanau gökhan gültekin 37
19 february 2020 hanau ferhat unvar 22
19 february 2020 hanau hamza kurtović 22
19 february 2020 hanau mercedes kierpacz 35
19 february 2020 hanau sedat gürbüz 30
19 february 2020 hanau kalojan welkow 32
19 february 2020 hanau vili viorel păun 23
19 february 2020 hanau fatih saraçoğlu 34
19 february 2020 hanau said nessar el hashemi 21
19 february 2020 hanau gabriele rathjen 72

12 february 2020 altenburg mario k. 52
7 april 2020 celle arkan hussein khalaf 15
16 may 2020 dortmund ibrahim demir 41
14 july 2020 mahlow noël martin 61
18 september 2021 idar-oberstein alexander w. 20

family murders königs wusterhausen-senzig
4 december 2021 linda richter 40
4 december 2021 leni richter 10
4 december 2021 janni richter 8
4 december 2021 rubi richter 4

24 january 2022 heidelberg female student 23
10 february 2023 berlin-französisch buchholz yazy almiah 44

now i need i need to just i need to just need to stop for a moment i need a break i need to catch my breath breathe for a second calm down collect myself hold it for a moment things can just wait everything can wait a moment of silence when all stops and is still

pause

i breathe in and out almost like meditating i breathe deeply in and out

pause

i breathe deeply in and out before i continue

pause

and what i really cant help noticing some of them are so young like songül for example she is 4 and saime genc is also 4 the two could play catch in kindergarten or play house or dario s. 2 and kristina s. 2 and aynül s. 4 rubi richter 4 and jean-daniel makodila kosi 3 dano m. 5 legrand makodila mbongo 5 and ercan s. 5 and ümit satir 5 maybe even ignatz platzer 6 all children in kindergarten

and an child from sri lanka one year old probably still with mommy and daddy but maybe with his or her day nanny or maybe also in kindergarten already that was a really great time you play all day and eat and drink and play and all with so many other small children like yourself you quarrel too of course there is always quarrel no matter what age but in retrospect a wonderful time i feel and all have baby faces

and then there are michael silbermann and sven silbermann the facts on the list say they were 22 and 24 years old in november 1995 and i know and we all at once know that they are brothers thats how simple people are there is one other option at best and thats that they are cousins there are no other options at least not in 1995 because they couldnt have been married in 1995 that is how simple people are they are one way or the other clearly family clear as daylight cant be more obvious thats how simple that is and the list says november 1995 dresden thats what the list says so michael and sven died in november 1995 in dresden most likely brothers at the age of 22 and 24 they will have lived as brothers until then knowing each other all their lives so they had been laughing and crying together on this planet for 22 years they had the same parents or the same mother or the same father and maybe they even had other siblings or they had mutual friends went to the same kindergarten they celebrated christmas together gave each other silly presents like socks and drank beer and partied probably fought a few times very hard and so forth and so forth and then they died together in november 1995 as violent crime victims and although it is unknown how many other people had a hand in their deaths we do know pretty well that with two young men there must have been at least two people involved in the deaths of michael and sven and even though the list doesnt give the exact date on which they died the list makes it very clear that it must have been the same day there is no other option popping up in my little human

mind because thats how simple people are and thats how simple lists made by people are

and the lists keep growing and they are alive they have a life of their own they become something else a living thing because they can grow and they do they change they do something to themselves to the names the places they mix everything in one kneading everything together

and thats how the list is alive by growing things togetherwordstogether belzig balaidbelaid baylal greifswald eckhardt rütz milzau willi worg jarmen mohammed beljadjbelhadj bad blankenburg axel urbanietz nuremberg abdurrahim özüdoğru hamburg-bahrenfeld süleyman taşköprü wittenberge klaus-dieter harns dahlewitzharns dahlewitz dieter manzke fulda dorit botts münchen habil kılıç and the list makes everything in one do you still hear a difference between the places and the names do you hear different things i only hear one thing a place or a name the names are engraved into the places and the words engraved into the names so it is ROSTOCK MEHMET TURGUT and together they are one indivisible in all lists following this one in all eternity and when we memorize the list we memorize it as one and there is no other way to read it than this because this list is meant for eternity and this new history is carved from my rib scratched out of it you see this new history is carved out of my broken rib from the bone fragments you see them the fragments between my ribs the broken ones ALTENBURG MARIO K. CELLE ARKAN HUSSEIN KHALAF DORTMUND IBRAHIM DEMIR MAHLOW NOËL MARTIN IDAR-OBERSTEIN ALEXANDER W. ANGERMÜNDE ERNST FISK MARKKLEEBURG-GASCHWITZ NUNO LOURENÇO GUBEN FARID GUENDOUL DUISBURG-WALSUM EGON EFFERTZ FRANKFURT ON MAIN AAMIR AGEEB KÖLN EROL ISPIR ESCHEDE PETER DEUTSCHMANN KOLBERMOOR CARLOS FERNANDO HOHENSTEIN-ERNSTTHAL PATRICK THÜRMER BERLIN-LICHTENBERG KURT SCHNEIDER LÖBEJÜN HANS-WERNER GÄRTNER

and i need a break again this mass of names crushing me every time

pause

their names are like a landscape of names an area ever growing in size

and between these names of the dead there are reams of others that do not appear on this list because they did not die but got away injured they are not on this list but on other lists existing too and then there are the names that appear on no list at all because they belong to people how neither died nor were they physically injured but were hit with words what the words do to them doesnt appear in lists because words are the everyday weapons of language words hitting the skin and penetrating the brain words saying i must not live here i must not live not sleep not eat not drink here that i must do nothing here i mustnt even breathe i should simply do nothing the words penetrate me and spread out inside me they run through my nerves and want to eat at me they want to nibble off pieces that belong to me that are of me that make me gnaw them off between their teeth they want to gnaw grind down grind between their teeth and process to smallest particles and gnaw away do away make me disappear they want to make me disappear

and the words hit the cells press through the cell walls straight into the brain straight into me into what is me that is where i am made with these words i am made there what i am is made my stuff

my core my essence my character my soul what i am what i am made of right there the words force their way in and make who i am if i swallow the words i will be lost if i swallow the words i will be lost

the borders between the bodies have dissolved the borders of my body have dissolved my body is already so wasted by the attacks and assaults and the blows and spit and fire and all the blows of the words my body has no borders anymore to keep up there is no skin anymore to keep anything out everything penetrates this body and the looks they just run through so transparent so thin almost waferthin is my body it is entirely without borders and with this body you dont need any secret operations anymore with this body that is so defenseless even the appearance of an accident is not kept any longer now the perpetrators simply use what you without a doubt call a weapon and shoot this body

metal is delivered to the factories and is formed inside and some metal is formed into circles circular forms into rounds that fit into weapons to be shot out bullets made to enter bodies perforate them break their skin their muscles break their bones to break through them to break them

and many stand silent in front of these words that drill through bodies and the injured and wounded bodies and they are silent their mouths simply motionless in these situations there is a paralysis a paralysis located precisely in the lips and in the throat or sometimes in the legs and arms but most often in the region of the mouth so i see how people dont talk for example and are silent but still able to keep walking so most often the paralysis or the muteness is not in their legs and arms but only in the region of their mouths i also see the people watching so they walk and watch and their eyes are directly looking at that thing but they keep walking or briefly stop but because of a very very brief confusion and the confusion is probably thats how i figure it something so genuinely human in the brain well we have not mutated that far yet to show no reaction at all i mean the body does still react to it but only for the shortest instant and then the legs and arms and feet and whatever is part of this body-walks-away-action doesnt skip a beat all that it just keeps going so short is this show-a-reaction mechanism that may still exist in us from the evolution and then you switch that off and quickly move your body out of this situation i mean out of there quickly quickly away from it this paralysis these silent mouths thats where you can find them and paralysis is really the wrong word no i really mean muteness it is silence not paralysis but muteness there is something active about it so much more active than paralysis paralysis is something one is entirely overcome by something you cannot do anything about a situation in which you are remote controlled no thats not it either you are left prey to the malfunction of your body and you are not master or mistress of the situation but these mute mouths they are like that because they choose to be silent they really are masters and mistresses of their muscles and fully aware that they should say something simply shut these mouths they remain closed locked simply mum not a peep

and where is the limit how much silence is still passivity how much silence is still passivity how much keeping silent and observing and seeing with your own eyes does it take and how much do you need to hear and still remain silent for that silence to require an effort of its own how much silence is still this quick-looking-away and forget-right-away in everyday life and how much silence is still really passive and where is the tipping point when is that moment when you have

to make such an effort to keep silent that this silence becomes an act

and my words break off and they remain unspoken and these incomplete broken words do not enter the world and remain inside me there at their origin and the words stack up unspoken and instead of falling into the world and moving around and unfolding they are stuck inside of me falling back into me into my parts into my cells blocking everything inside blocking me they make me stiff and rigid more and more of them so many words clogging inside of me until there is no more room for them and then they break my body from the inside and break me as a whole my soul and all of me

you understand i break from the world and i am stuck inside of me in a vessel stuffed with words and almost popping wanting to tear it open and always remaining there almost apopping and although there is no more room more words keep coming and still more an endless stream of words from an endless wound here and everywhere on my body

i see your face more clearly now when we met today i saw you for the first time i see you with different eyes today they can see sharper or im seeing in a different way or use them differently or you have stood in front of me a long time showed me your face so i could study it so i had time to look at it and take in the lines of your face to examine the wrinkles around your eyes the movements of your face thats what you stood here for and gave me time for thats what we did differently today we took some time in our encounter and now i dont only smell sweat and deodorant and detergent but you its not individual things i smell but now i smell you and now i dont see a face two hands and arms and legs but you i see you now thats what we did differently today at first we stood across from each other two people hardly knowing each other and we both did this so first we stood we both stood facing each other looking at each other i looking at you and you looking at me we looked at each other we did that together i you then i again and again you and at the same time we scanned each other with our eyes felt each other with our hands first i looked at you or no first you looked at me or something we stood together in the same space looking at each other first you came or i came first first i stood here or you stood and we both stood here first you or i then i no you or the other way round we looked at each other and examined each other and even observed each other you gave me time to examine you and i gave you time to examine me we both took time to really see the face of the person in front of us and the body the presence of that body we gave each other time for that first we looked examined observed skeptically maybe there was some skepticism in our eyes at first it stuck to our eyes on our eyes in our eyes but then i got used to looking at you and you got used to it and we got used to looking at each other and deal with each others presence to accept that we stood across from each other because we usually dont do that we dont usually meet so directly face to face and not for so long either and not with the others gaze fully on us we usually dont do that

An earlier version of *body w/o borders* received a public staged reading in The Process Series at Swain Hall of UNC Chapel Hill on April 21 and 22, 2022, directed by Joseph Megel and performed by Sanjana Taskar.

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Silent Days, Sleepless Nights

By Carmen Pellegrinelli

Translated from Italian by Carmen Pellegrinelli

Introductory Note

This text—originally written by me in Italian—was created during a theatre workshop organised by doctors and nurses from the emergency department of Bergamo's largest hospital, Papa Giovanni XXIII, to process the traumatic memories of confronting the COVID crisis in March 2020. As is widely known, Bergamo, a medium-sized town in northern Italy, was one of the cities hardest hit by the virus, losing more than 6,000 people in just two months. The COVID crisis in Bergamo was especially devastating for the emergency department, which, within a few days, had to organise itself to deal with an overwhelming number of patients infected with the virus. The workshop and the resulting text led to the creation of a show featuring the doctors and nurses themselves on stage, which premiered in March 2023 at the Teatro Sociale in Bergamo.

Silent Days, Sleepless Nights is based on their testimonies, as well as improvisations that arose during the theatre workshop. My task as playwright was to weave together the material from the collective work to give it a dramatic form, creating unity while respecting the diversity of perspectives and voices. I have described elsewhere the choices made in composing the text, which blends stories from the ward, choruses from the community, and excerpts from classical texts on the plague. I invite readers to consult these publications for more details on how the text was crafted and its narrative paths (Pellegrinelli & Parolin, 2024a, 2024b, 2025).

Here I would like to share some reflections on the translation from Italian to English. The first English version of the text, created for an Italian edition (Pellegrinelli 2024), was translated by one of the doctors involved in the project and later revised by me. The initial plan was to publish it as a parallel text; however, due to editorial reasons, this did not occur, and only the original Italian version was published. Building on that translation, I have further revised the text for this publication, aiming to refine it and to unfold it from its theatrical context, making it more accessible and inclusive.

For this reason, I replaced the original names of doctors and nurses with other designations. I chose to characterise them through their social or professional roles, as well as with numbers (e.g., Nurse Number One, Nurse Number Two). This approach allowed me to highlight the collective nature of the Covid tragedy: in a context where patients, overwhelmed by the enormous number of cases and united by the same virus, ended up becoming numbers, doctors and nurses also shared the same fate, reduced to numbers while they all devoted themselves to treating a single disease. At the same time, this territory made by numbers was the ground on which very touching stories could emerge.

Silent Days, Sleepless Nights is divided into two acts, entitled “The Rise” and “The Fall”. Each act consists of 12 scenes, some of which are composed solely of collective stage movements without dialogues. As you will observe when reading, many stories are connected to what occurred in Bergamo and Italy before, during, and after the pandemic. In particular, the citizens' choruses refer

to local incidents that contributed to the outbreak of the crisis. For example, the text describes in the first chorus of citizens (scene 2) the failure of the Lombardy Region, the responsible institution, to close a critical hospital in the area (the Alzano hospital) after learning that the virus was spreading there. Furthermore, again through the citizens' chorus, the text recounts the catchphrases (scene 14) related to the impossibility of citizens leaving their homes, the fear of not following government directives, and the practice of singing songs from balconies to combat loneliness (Lucio Battisti is a famous Italian singer; Bella Ciao is the most well-known left-wing song in Italy). And again, the text mentions, with a chorus of citizens, the denialism associated with the No Vax movements (scene 21), which was widespread in Italy at that time. Here, to translate the Italian word "negazionista", I used the term "Covid sceptical" to refer to conspiracy theorists who believe that the pandemic was staged by governments. I have added notes in the text to explain all these references to recent Italian history and culture.

The scenes set in the hospital, based on the accounts of doctors and nurses, are less specific to particular socio-cultural contexts and could have taken place in healthcare facilities across many parts of the world. They mainly focus on relationships: between professionals and patients, and between patients and their families.

Generally, the translation from Italian to English aims to capture the immediacy of the original text, along with its poetic tension and musicality. It is through these formal elements that the thematic core of the work is conveyed, encompassing stories of life, compassion, and resilience among doctors and nurses at the hospital in Bergamo. For the final version below, I also consulted with my colleague and friend Fraser King, PhD, a former lecturer in Political Science in the UK and a professional proofreader.

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Carmen Pellegrinelli is an Italian academic working at the crossroads of social sciences and theatre. She has extensive experience as a dramaturg and director, with productions performed and recognised in Italy, France, Switzerland, and Austria. This experience has shaped her social science research, in which she advocates an innovative approach that combines art and activism for social change from a posthumanist perspective. In 2023, she earned her PhD from the University of Lapland for her work on collective organisational creativity. She has published several academic articles on theatre, performance, and organisational studies, providing an original theatrical perspective to social sciences. She collaborates on international research projects focusing on participatory design and social change. She is the author of "Performing Ensemble Practices, Theatre, and Social Change" (Brill, 2023), a sociological and theatrical study analysing

the collective practices of the Italian theatre company ATIR and their contribution to social change processes. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Trieste, where she studies participatory methods in healthcare AI research.

Silent Days, Sleepless Nights

Written and translated from Italian by Carmen Pellegrinelli

CAST OF CHARACTERS
The head physician or the storyteller
ER doctor No. 0
ER Doctor No. 1 to 10
ER Nurse No. 1 to 6
The infectious disease specialist
Patient No. 0
Patient No. 1 to 16
Citizen No. 1 to 10
COVID-19 sceptics No. 1 to 8
Some Voice-overs from Switzerland, Norway, France, Usa
A daughter
A lady
A singer
A musician

Act 1: The rise

Two musicians are on stage with a cello and a guitar. They start improvising.

SCENA 1 – The head physician becomes the storyteller

A head physician enters the scene wearing a lab coat

A MUSICIAN
The microphone is over there.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
I hate theatre.
I fell asleep at the theatre.
Even if I'm well-rested.
Even if the seats are uncomfortable.
Even if the heating is not on, even if Toni Servillo[1] is on stage.
I hate theatre.
But most of all, I hate amateurs. Beginners.
Those who enter and exit through fake doors.
Those who watch the clock to show they're waiting. I hate them.

[1] Toni Servillo is a renowned Italian actor and director, recognised internationally, who has worked in both cinema and theatre throughout his career.

Nonetheless, Tonight, I am here.
As an amateur.
As a beginner.
As a complete novice.
Because I admit,
I need it.

SCENA 2 – Chorus of citizens at the sauna

A group of people wearing bathrobes and towels on their heads enters the stage and lies down in a plastic position. They are relaxed, smiling and a little bored.

CITIZEN No. 1
No, but I mean… a flu slightly stronger than usual, you can't really call it a mysterious pneumonia. Come on.

CITIZEN No. 2
Forget it. It's something from China. It'll never reach here.

CITIZEN No. 3
I hope I get it so that I can stay home from work.
- - – – – -
CITIZEN No. 4
Well, you won't believe it - yesterday, I went to the supermarket and saw someone wearing a face mask.

ALL THE CITIZENS TOGETHER
Noooooooo

CITIZEN No. 5
Really? But look how people are overreacting.

CITIZEN No. 4
Yes, I mean, when you put on a facemask, you also scare others.

ALL THE CITIZENS TOGETHER
Ehhhhhhh
- - – – – -
CITIZEN No. 6
Yeah, they do it on purpose. It's the strategy of terror. They want everyone at home to control us better.

CITIZEN No. 4
Right! Write it on Facebook, it is time to strike a blow to the system.
- - – – – -

CITIZEN No. 8
Excuse me, but how many kilometres from Codogno[2] to Bergamo?

CITIZEN No. 4
About 80, I think….

CITIZEN No. 8
Ah! Can you imagine how long it takes to get here?

ALL THE CITIZENS TOGETHER
Ohhhh

- - — — —

CITIZEN No. 6
It's one bit of fake news after another. They show these Chinese people all dressed up, but really, they were already wearing facemasks due to pollution.

- - — — —

CITIZEN No. 10
Coughing
I've had this cough for a month. You have no idea how annoying it is. Next week, I had planned a trip to the mountains with my high school friends.

CITIZEN No. 6
Huh? You're not staying home just because of a bit of cough, are you?

CITIZEN No. 10
Nah, of course, I'm going. What's the worst that can happen? At most, if I don't feel well, I'll sit in a bar and have hot chocolate with the old folks.

- - — — —

CITIZEN No. 7
Avoid Chinese restaurants and you'll be fine.

- - — — —

CITIZEN No. 11
Getting up to exit the stage and addressing the audience
And have a drink once in a while! You see, this thing is only dangerous if you're old or have various illnesses. Finally, if you're young, robust, vigorous, strong, moderately healthy, fit, and not suffering from heart disease: it's a very mild virus.
Citizens 11, 3 and 6 exit the stage

- - — — —

CITIZEN No. 1
No, I say, now, for this fucking flu, do we do Ramadan?
Shops, businesses, everything closed. We're from Bergamo – we don't even stop for Christmas; we won't stop now for a slight fever. Bergamo is running! Keep going!
Citizens 1, 10, 8 and 6 exit the stage

- - — — —

[2] Codogno is an Italian municipality in the province of Lodi in Lombardy, where the first confirmed outbreak in Italy of COVID-19 was identified, dating back to February 2020.

CITIZEN No. 7
Excuse me, but what are we talking about? We've all seen these Chinese people eating live rats dipped in soy sauce! It's evident that they get sick afterwards, come on!

- - — — — -

CITIZEN No. 9
You know, you can easily kill this virus with hot soup. Yesterday, I got a WhatsApp message from my cousin, who heard from her friend, who knows a researcher who worked with a guy in China who knew a doctor… who knew how to treat it. So, it's a piece of cake.
Citizens 10, 9 and 5 exit the stage

- - — — — -

CITIZEN No. 2
Is it true that they closed the Emergency Room in Alzano[3] because of the virus? My mom fell, and I want to bring her there.

CITIZEN No. 4
Yes, but they reopened it later.

CITIZEN No. 2
Ah... I see. Thanks.
Well then... I'll take her right away.

Everybody, exit the stage. Live music plays.
Then, slowly, a group of thirty actors enter the stage.

SCENE 3 – The contagion

The actors' bodies touch, mingle, dance, form figures, and then melt away. From the group, an Emergency Room doctor, referred to as ER doctor number Zero (0), advances to the proscenium. She speaks, addressing the audience.

SCENA 4 – Nobody in the ER

ER DOCTOR No. 0
Just a few days after the first case in Codogno, there was a moment when, overnight, the triage was empty.
No trauma.
No colic pains.
No car or motorcycle accidents.
No kitchen cuts.

[3] The Alzano Lombardo's Hospital (Pesenti-Fenaroli) is a healthcare facility situated in Val Seriana, Bergamo Province, northern Italy. During the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic (February 2020), the hospital became a hotspot, with positive cases and deaths reported. On this occasion, the hospital was closed and then reopened within a few hours on the orders of the Lombardy Region (the institution responsible), without adequate sanitisation or differentiated pathways. For this reason, the decisions that were taken are now the subject of a judicial investigation.

No wounds.
No infections, no strokes, no burns.
No food poisonings.
No chicken bones stuck in the throat.
No bruises.
No anaphylactic shocks, no heart attacks, no broken femurs.
No psychiatric cases.
Out of the two hundred or more daily admissions, there was no one left in the emergency room.
We laughed.
We said, “Imagine if every day were like this.”

SCENA 5 – The fear

Live Music plays and arises.
After the ER doctor's No. 0 speech, the actors around her start walking, looking at each other and smiling. The quality of their walk changes. Concern increases.
Actors look at each other as if searching for someone they cannot find. Their actions become increasingly frenetic until they suddenly stop.
The head physician, as storyteller, takes the floor. Slowly, everybody exits the scene.

SCENA 6 – The storm

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
Thus, it is before every storm. So, the Iliad tells us. When Apollo sent the plague into the Achaean camp, to avenge the daughter of his priest who had been taken from them, his priest prayed:
“Let the Achaeans pay for my tears with your arrows”.
Apollo came down from the peak of Mount Olympus with a heart full of anger.
He descended like the night.
Then, far from the ships,
he aimed and let loose furious arrows from a silver bow.
First, at the mules.
Then at swift-footed dogs.
And finally, at all humans.
The storyteller exits the stage. The ER doctor, number 1, and the first COVID-19 patient, referred to as Patient No. Zero (0), take the floor.

SCENE 7 – Patient No. Zero (0)

HEALTH WORKER VOICE-OVER
Hello, I’m calling from the operations centre.
I want to inform you that a 55-year-old man is on his way from Alzano Hospital in a simple ambulance with a fever and shortness of breath.

They report that his oxygen saturation is 82% in ambient air.
His father is hospitalised in Alzano and has tested positive for COVID-19.

ER DOCTOR No. 1
There he is!
Our first Covid case.
And we still don't know where to examine him.

PATIENT No. 0
I called 911.
My father is in the intensive care unit. I've had a slight fever for three days.

ER DOCTOR No. 1
There he is!
Our first Covid case.
And we don't know if we'll be safe in our uniforms.

PATIENT No. 0
I have chills, especially in the evening. But I don't feel that bad.

ER DOCTOR No. 1
There he is.
And we still don't know if we'll be ready.

PATIENT No. 0
Let me get over the fever, and everything will be fine.

ER DOCTOR No. 1
There he is.
The X-ray is shocking. Where have the lungs gone? It's our first COVID case.
And we still don't know exactly what treatment we'll give him.

ER doctor number 1 and patient number 0 exit the stage.

SCENA 8 – One patient, two patients

ER doctor No. 2 enters. She has a wired microphone in her hand.
Epic music plays in the background, getting louder and louder.

ER DOCTOR No. 2
One patient, two patients
There is time to listen to them.
Five patients, six patients
frightened by the unknown,
more and more seriously ill.

Ten patients, fifteen patients,
there is a queue of ambulances.
The emergency room lobby is filled with people coughing.
Twenty patients, thirty patients.
To make it quicker: name, surname, and date of birth
hung on the beds.
They are all piled up.
There is no more space in the corridors.
They are side by side in makeshift beds.
And they don’t understand what is going on.
One hundred patients, two hundred patients.
They arrive en masse.
Late into the night
Supported by relatives
Ambulances are no longer there
They start dying in the emergency room
We can't go on like this
If they don't stop, we won't make it.
We need more material.
We need more gloves.
We need more masks.
We need more oxygen tanks.
We need more oxygen helmets.
We need more beds.
We need more protective suits.
We need more doctors.
We need more time.
We need a cure.
If they increase any more, we'll collapse.
Altogether.

SCENA 9 – Fall and Choreography

As the music continues, actors take turns running across the stage. As they run, many of them fall and get back up.
Finally, the group reassembles and builds a large human sculpture around the narrator. Then, the sculpture dissolves.
The music stops.
Each actor takes a bag out of their pocket and puts it on their head. They then take up a distributed position on the scene.
They begin to ask the audience questions.
They remove their faces from the bag for a while when they talk.

SCENA 10 - Chorus of citizens becoming patients

PATIENT No. 1
Why are you sending me to the intensive care unit?

PATIENT No. 2
Do I have to stay here much longer?

PATIENT No. 3
Are you sure about what you're doing?

PATIENT No. 4
Why am I in the neurology ward if I have pneumonia?

PATIENT No. 5
I don't have my pyjamas.

PATIENT No. 6
Who are you?

PATIENT No. 7
Why are we all sick?

PATIENT No. 8
Do you have a treatment for it?

PATIENT No. 2
Can I have some water?

PATIENT No. 9
Where is my son?

PATIENT No. 10
Is it day or night?

PATIENT No. 11
Why is no one helping me?

PATIENT No. 12
Can I have some lip balm? My lips are dry.

PATIENT No. 13
Do the lights ever, ever turn off?

PATIENT No. 14
The straps under my armpits are pulling.

PATIENT No. 10
Is it day or night?

PATIENT No. 15
I need to use the restroom.

PATIENT No. 11
Can you give me earplugs?

PATIENT No. 15
I no longer want this helmet. Take it off!

PATIENT No. 3
Could you give me some morphine? I don't want to feel anything.

PATIENT No. 16
Can someone say a prayer for me?

PATIENT No. 5
Can I brush my teeth?

PATIENT No. 10
Is it day or night?

PATIENT No. 6
Where did my bed neighbour go?

PATIENT No. 7
What's the oxygen saturation today?

PATIENT No. 8
How can I piss in front of everyone?

PATIENT No. 16
Who will feed my cats?

PATIENT No. 9
Don't the lights ever turn off?

PATIENT No. 10
Is it day or night?

PATIENT No. 1
Can we video call my daughter?

PATIENT No. 12
But… What day is it today?

PATIENT No. 13
Let me go home.

PATIENT No. 14
Let me die.

PATIENT No. 17
I don't want the tube.

PATIENT No. 11
Do you have candy?

PATIENT No. 10
Is it day or night?

PATIENT No. 15
Please tell my parents that I love them!

The patients exit the stage, and the plastic bags are on the floor. The ER Nurse No. 1 stays to pick them up.
In the background is the Storyteller.

SCENA 11 – The Rosary

ER NURSE No. 1
I change. I get dressed.
I arrive at work to start my shift.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
I endure countless hardships.

ER NURSE No. 1
The emergency room corridor is full of stretchers.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
My people are suffering.

ER NURSE No. 1
There are oxygen tanks everywhere.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
And thoughts provide no weapon to create a shield.

ER NURSE No. 1
They are huge and make a noise that pierces the ears.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
Fruits no longer grow on the earth.

ER NURSE No. 1
They pump air into the patients.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
You can see, they are one on top of each other.

ER NURSE No. 1
Bodies lying on stretchers.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
Daughters and sons falling on the shores of God, like birds with beautiful wings.

ER NURSE No. 1
Sweating. Trembling.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
Struck by an untameable fire.

ER NURSE No. 1
Sheets hanging.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
You can see them, daughters and sons, bearers of death.

ER NURSE No. 1
A man's boot is left in a corner.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
And without mercy.

ER NURSE No. 1
And water bottles. Open. Fallen. Empty.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
The city perishes from countless deaths.

ER NURSE No. 1
In a chorus of laboured breathing.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
They lie on the plain without lament.

ER NURSE No. 1
Goggles on their noses.
Masks.
Flow.
- - – - -

ER NURSE No. 1
I look up and meet the gaze of a patient. He's on a red stretcher.
There were no normal ones left. He calls me.
He's not much older than me. I approach him.
He asks: “Will I ever see my children again?”. Yes, of course.
Then I go back and do my job.
I prepare IVs, antibiotic drips, and blood draws. I go back to the corridor. With a quick glance, I scan all the patients.
I don't skip one.
I arrange pillows. Tuck in blankets. Wipe away sweat.
Then, my gaze falls on him again. He raises his hand.
I approach.
He struggles to speak.
He has a high-flow mask. I ask if I can do something. He says, “Find me a Rosario”
A rosary? Where? How? I go back to my spot.
I resume preparing IVs, antibiotic therapies, and blood draws. Then, without telling anyone, instinctively, I remove my sweat-soaked gown. I rush out of the Emergency Room.
I run toward the Holy Mary statue in the central parking lot. I see a Rosario in her hands.
I grab it.
I've got it! I've got it!
I run back to the Emergency Room. And I bring it to him as if it were oxygen.

ER Nurse No.1 exits the stage, leaving the storyteller alone on the stage. The live music plays.

SCENA 12 – Oedipus Rex

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
There is no place untouched by ruin.
Every age and gender falls in the same way.
And this plague that brings death
takes young and old, fathers and daughters. The same fire burns newlyweds as well.
And the premature deaths receive neither tears nor lamentation.
In fact, as with all extreme evils, such a stubborn slaughter, such great misfortune, has dried the eyes, and there are no more tears.
The storyteller exits the stage.

Act 2: The Fall

SCENE 13 - Nonstop

Five ER nurses take the floor.

ER NURSE No. 2
I feel the uniform against my skin. It's full of sweat.
I stink.
But it doesn't matter; I'll be home in a few minutes. I drive through the empty streets.
Home - work; work - home; home - work; work - home. As if I'm condemned to live the same day over and over. The last bit of energy slips away with the shower drain.
I eat with my head dropping into my plate.
Then, I reach the sofa. I'm tired, so tired, but I can't sleep.
The pile of dirty laundry grows.
The dust on the furniture accumulates.
Before I realise it, it’s already time to go back to work.

ER NURSE No. 3
A coffee with my colleagues. We have 10 minutes left.
Then we're all crowded in a room. Gowns, overgowns, facemasks.
We need a little laughter. We crack jokes.
We know it's the only chance to talk.
Then, everyone out. Each to their station. We're off!
I think. I want an adventurous life.

ER NURSE No. 4
And off we go.
Desperate faces, non-stop. Outstretched hands, non-stop. Wide-eyed, non-stop.
Stretchers, one, ten, a hundred, a thousand. A battlefield.
Am I dreaming?

ER NURSE No. 5
The ventilator alarm brings me back to reality. The infusion pump.
The monitor. Blood pressure. Shut one up.
Another starts. Let's go!
You need to intubate, non-stop. Hurry, non-stop.
Check the parameters, non-stop. Take blood samples, non-stop. Monitor the therapies, non-stop.
Bring a blanket, non-stop.
The nurses exit the stage, leaving Nurse No.6 alone.

ER NURSE No. 6
Don't get distracted. Don't make mistakes. The doctor is talking to you.
The phone rings.
The shift slips away in an instant. I undress. I wash.

I grab a pastry they gave us.
I eat it as I walk down the hallway, in my lovely, sweaty uniform.
Horrible hair stuck to my forehead.
My face, purple, with lines from the mask. Until next time.
Nurse No.6 exits the stage.

SCENE 14 – Chorus of citizens locked in their houses

A group of citizens dressed casually and holding phones enters. They walk in a circle around the scene.

CITIZEN No. 1
But what if I went out and got a couple of things at the mall? The store behind the house no longer has anything. Just a quick in-and-out, huh?

CITIZEN No. 2
It's such a mess with all these directives. Oh, I'm taking a painkiller because this mess is giving me a headache.

CITIZEN No. 3
I bought an anti-COVID pendant. Look how cute it is...

CITIZEN No. 4
But instead, I say: why don't just the scared ones stay at home? Let the rest go out...

CITIZEN No. 5
Girls, my neighbour has made some beautiful crocheted face masks. I always use them when I go shopping.

CITIZEN No. 6
Look there, at Mr Mangili. What is he doing outdoors? He's retired!?! Oh, I'll take a photo and send it to the police!

CITIZEN No. 7
Oh, I will get away with it: I've been wearing the same surgical mask for a month!

CITIZEN No. 8
Do you take the dog out like this? Look, even Barbara D'Urso said to clean its paws with bleach.

CITIZEN No. 9
Enough with all these virologists on TV. Objective data should be given once a week.

CITIZEN No. 10
Anyway, I don't believe a single word of what the newspapers say: I've always been a contrarian and always will be.

CITIZEN No. 11
Oh, what shall we sing on the balcony today? Battisti or Bella Ciao[4]?

The musicians start playing Bella Ciao.
The citizens exit the stage, leaving only one of them on stage.

SCENA 15 - Brioches

She changes her clothes and becomes ER doctor No. 3.

ER DOCTOR No. 3
I remember... I am on the afternoon shift.
The hall is complete, but there are still a few CPAP machines.
It is still the early days.
It's dinnertime.
My gaze falls on a patient, around fifty-five to sixty years old, who's really struggling to breathe.
Our eyes meet.
I can see that he's in bad shape. I read fear in his eyes.
But he also reads fear in mine. Dinner arrives.
I approach.
I try to help him eat.
He says to me
“Doctor, I can't do it. It's either breathing or eating”.
Come on, you can do it.
“It's either breathing or eating”.
Come on, at least try to have a sip: It can help you…
“It's either breathing or eating”.
There is no way. He can’t.
“Now, I'll leave you alone. But I promise I'll come back tomorrow, I’ll bring you a croissant, and we'll have breakfast together”.

In the evening, at home, I think about him. I can't rest.
It is hard to fall asleep.
In the morning, my first thought is to find two croissants. I find them.
I rush to the Emergency Room. He’s not there.
Now it’s full, but all faces are different from the night before.
I look for him in the shock room. And there I find him.
He's wearing a CPAP helmet.
He's got the helmet on, so he can't hear me.
I see, in his eyes, that he recognises me. I get closer, and I show him the croissants.
“Two: one for me and one for you… breakfast together”.
But we can't do it now. I'll be back later.

[4] Lucio Battisti was a renowned Italian singer in the 1960s, sometimes associated with the right-wing movement. Bella Ciao, a song written during the Second World War, is a famous left-wing piece. These two songs represent the perennial Italian conflict between right and left in civil society.

I put the croissants on the bedside table.
We say goodbye with a look.
I turn around.
I won't see him again.
ER Doctor No 3. Exits the stage.

SCENE 16 – Dad

A girl runs to the middle and asks the doctor if she is worried about her father.

A DAUGHTER
I cannot find my daddy… Dad!?! Dad?!?
She moves between the microphones, searching and calling out to the point of desperation. Then, the young woman exits the stage.
In the background, the beep of a cardiac monitor machine starts.

SCENE 17 – Bad News

A lady, the wife of a patient, and ER doctor No.4 enter the stage.
A telephone call between the wife of a patient and an ER doctor.

A LADY
Good evening, doctor, tell me.

ER DOCTOR No. 4
Unfortunately, I have to give you some bad news, ma'am. Your husband has deteriorated this afternoon.

A LADY
But is he alive?

ER DOCTOR No. 4
He's alive, but we had to sedate him. Do you remember that I called you yesterday?

A LADY
Yes.

ER DOCTOR No. 4
And he was improving a bit.

A LADY
Yes.

ER DOCTOR No. 4
However, today the intensivist arrived, and he has been intubated. So now he's in intensive care.

A LADY
Can I see him?

ER DOCTOR No. 4
No, unfortunately not. You know that in these times...

A LADY
Please, just three minutes, one minute...

ER DOCTOR No. 4
Look, I realize the situation is critical, but it's not possible to see him. We'll keep you informed of any changes.

A LADY
But is he awake now?

ER DOCTOR No. 4
No, he's sedated.

A LADY
Did he say something?

ER DOCTOR No. 4
He said goodbye... and that he loves you.

A LADY
Will I see him again?

ER DOCTOR No. 4
We'll do everything we can to try to pull him out of this situation, even though it's indeed very critical.

A LADY
But I don’t understand. When I brought him, he was fine. He had trouble breathing, but he was fine.

ER DOCTOR No. 4
Unfortunately, this illness has these complications.

A LADY
Can I call you from time to time? To know…

ER DOCTOR No. 4
Of course, I'll call you. Is that okay?

A LADY
But when will you call me?

ER DOCTOR No. 4
I'll call you every day, around this time, all right?

A LADY
So, nothing until tomorrow?

ER DOCTOR No. 4
No...

A LADY
I really can't see him?

ER DOCTOR No. 4
No... you can't see him. I'm very sorry.

A LADY
Okay, okay, I understand. Thank you. Good evening.
They look at each other, turn their backs, and exit in opposite directions. Live music plays.

SCENA 18 – La Bigi

A doctor takes the floor: the infectious disease specialist

THE INFECTIOUS DISEASE SPECIALIST
She answered on the first ring: you could tell she was waiting for the call. Her voice is calm, a bit hoarse.
I can imagine her standing in the dark hallway of an old house.
“Well, Mrs Rota, the situation isn't much different from yesterday. I've already explained... Well, he’s not doing well, to put it mildly.
He's an elderly man, and this disease is extremely dangerous for the elderly, you know.
He can't eat anymore, and I really don't think it would be good to push treatment beyond a certain point. So, I hope you can understand.”
And she says, “You see, doctor, it's because I'm not there with him. My husband needs me.
Doctor, we've been married for 55 years.
Ah, my nephew was right. He kept saying that.
When he brought us to the emergency room, he kept saying that once my husband was alone in the hospital, he would let himself go. He was right!”
“Do you have children, Mrs Rota?”
“No, doctor, it's just the two of us.

We've lived together for almost our entire lives.
Listen, doctor, could you do me a favour? When you go to him, tell him this:
'Giovanni, I have a message from your Bigi'. 'Bigi' is a nickname he gives me.
And tell him that I really can't be there with him right now, but that I love him. Just say to him, doctor. Please remember: 'Bigi.'
I'm sure it will help".
At this point, I need to pause; I can't go ahead. So, for a few seconds, Mrs Rota and I fall silent.
Each one is at the end of their rope.
Suddenly made dumb by the complete awkwardness of the situation.
A couple who have shared their entire existence, just before the end, are forever separated.
Oh God, I could tell Mrs Rota the truth: that her husband is no longer present, that he doesn't even respond, that these are truly his last hours.
But I'd rather not.
I prefer to let her believe that he will receive her greeting with my voice and feel her close.
This daily round of phone calls to the relatives is a sad ritual for us doctors who have found ourselves performing it every single day.
Nonetheless, I realise that I do await this moment: I myself need to keep these unreal conversations with invisible strangers going, so together, we peer into the darkness of our fears.
In that motionless moment, that is the time of care.

At this moment, the music of Albinoni's Adagio starts on the recording.
The group of actors enters the stage, creating a line-up at the front of the audience.

SCENA 19 – Dressing up

The actors, as medical professionals, slowly mimed dressing in PPE uniforms like a dance.
The scene reveals that they are the Emergency Room doctors and nurses preparing to enter a ward full of COVID patients every morning.
When they finish, the actors exit the stage.

SCENA 20 – Dad and son

The storyteller and ER doctor No.5 take the floor.

THE HEAD OF PHYSICIAN OR THE STORYTELLER
Dear father, don't be afraid. Hold on to my neck. I'll support you with my shoulders.
And you won't be a burden to me.
However, in the face of common danger, we will save ourselves together.

ER DOCTOR No. 5
Outside, it's quiet.
Only inside the hospital is there noise.
In the Emergency Room, there's Luigi, an elderly man.
He's been with us for four days now.

Four terrible days of bed, medications, and an oxygen mask.
We're having trouble finding him a spot in a ward.
Yet, he asks for just one thing every day. “Doctor, I want to see my son”.
“Luigi, you know we can't. We'd like to, but it's not possible.”
“But I'm asking only one thing, then you can leave me to go (or leave me to die). Doctor, I want to see my son”.
“Luigi, we are taking care of you so you can return to your son and family soon.” But he insists.
“Doctor, I need to see my son”.

The time comes for the phone call home.
As we do for any patient, we call Luigi’s son Pietro. Pietro has been waiting for the call all day.
“Good morning, this is Dr Nanni.
We spoke yesterday as well. I am calling to inform you about your dad.
Unfortunately, his condition is still very critical.
However, today we've managed to find a place where he can be admitted.
No, no, no, unfortunately, you can't see him.
Besides, he’s also asking all the time to see you.
The same rules apply in the ward as in the Emergency Room.
You can't enter the Emergency Room, just as you can't enter the ward. No, please, don't insist.
It's just not possible.”

Then, I think.
The hallway!
A tiny break from the rules. A small one.
The transition from the Emergency Room to the infectious diseases ward.
An instant.
But at least it's time for a farewell.
Maybe. We can make it.
“Listen, Pietro. So, we do it like this. It couldn't be done, huh?
In an hour, your dad goes up to the ward.
You come to the emergency room, and we'll have you meet in the hallway.
It'll be a very quick thing; I want to be honest with you.”
The time for this farewell is the brief moment it takes for a stretcher to be wheeled from the emergency room to the infectious diseases ward.
From one door to another door.

We prepare Luigi.
And Pietro is waiting on the other side of that door.
The door opens.
Luigi and Pietro meet each other:
“Pietro!”.
“Dad.”
“It’s so nice to see you, Pietro. Say hi to Mom. Kiss her”.
Kiss her. And the time is up.
Kiss her. And the doors close.
Kiss her. And Pietro and Luigi will never see each other again.

ER doctor number Five is chased off the scene by a group of angry citizens. They are COVID sceptics.

SCENE 21 – Chorus of citizens becoming Covid sceptical

COVID SCEPTICS No. 1
But take off that facemask.
We breathe carbon dioxide with the mask on! Come on and study how the lungs work.

COVID SCEPTICS No. 2
But do you still believe what they tell you?
How many people do you know who died of COVID-19? In Piacenza, Lodi, and Bergamo,[5]?
We want names and addresses!

COVID SCEPTICS No. 3
However, if you had a severe case of COVID without underlying conditions, it means you had something within you needing to be healed!

COVID SCEPTICS No. 4
The truth is that this virus is fortifying us.

COVID SCEPTICS No. 5
And they created it in a laboratory, the fantasy virus!

COVID SCEPTICS No. 6
But Covid doesn't exist...!!

COVID SCEPTICS No. 7
And the swab punctures one's membrane. Yes, you understood... I won't let my child's membrane be punctured!

COVID SCEPTICS No. 8
Am I free to say they moved the army trucks in front of the cameras to scare us all[6]?

COVID SCEPTICS No. 7
Is there still freedom of speech in this country, or are we in a dictatorship?

The sceptic COVID citizens exit the stage.
From the top of the stage, a headlight beam slowly descends.
Many white doctors' coats hang there.
The actors slowly enter the stage, approach the beam, take off their gowns, and put them on.
They all become ER doctors and nurses.

[5] These are all cities in the Bergamo area, in northern Italy.
[6] Here, the text refers to the famous image of the line of military vehicles carrying coffins away from the cemetery in Bergamo because there was not enough space to bury all the deceased.

Messages are heard from a voice-over.

SCENE 22 – Messages from the world

VOICE-OVER FROM SWITZERLAND
Hello, my friend. Here in Switzerland, everything remains quiet, but the peculiar thing is that there are two factions: those who believe it's all a setup and those who believe something terrible is about to happen. I decided to have my chief listen to your voicemail, and he sent it to the cantonal doctor. Now, our hospital in Locarno has become a COVID Centre, and today, we already have the first three patients on ventilators.

VOICE- OVER FROM FRANCE
Hello, my friend. Here in Paris, things are starting, but we managed to clear our hospital before the first patient arrived. This is thanks to you.

VOICE- OVER FROM NORWAY
I want to thank you for the podcasts and the interview with the doctors from Bergamo; they helped us prepare before the COVID wave reached Norway.

VOICE- OVER FROM USA
To the doctors, nurses, and all the hospital staff.
“In Japanese tradition, the crane is a sacred creature. Legend has it that anyone who folds a thousand paper cranes brings happiness and good fortune. On Easter Sunday, 2020, while reading The New York Times, I saw pictures of your faces. At that moment, I started folding paper cranes to honour all those faces. I’m sending you a part of these thousand cranes that will fly across the ocean. Accept them as an offering of hope, as a ray of happiness, as a way to tell you that your efforts are not going unnoticed.”

SCENE 23 – We are no heroes

ER DOCTOR No. 6
To those who…
To those who think they know more than we do.
To those who know what we should have done and failed to do in March 2020.
To those to whom no measure is good enough.
To those who believe they would have done it better.
To those who say, "What are you complaining about? You freely chose to care”.
To those who say, "So what if I catch it? Now everyone is asymptomatic."
To those who say, "Only old people get sick.”
To those who say, "Wearing a facemask restricts my personal freedom."

ER DOCTOR No. 7
And to those who like to call us heroes.
I mean, we are not heroes.

We are regular people.
Sometimes, we're even jerks.
And we've been jerks even in the toughest moments.

ER NURSE No. 6
Sometimes, before our shift, we'd stand in a circle and chant together, "Shit, shit, shit!"

ER DOCTOR No. 8
And that time when someone found a bottle of red wine, and we toasted on empty stomachs?
ER NURSE No. 2
Yes, but say it was at the end of our shift, huh? The hospital management is sitting here in the theatre...

ER DOCTOR No. 1
And since we couldn't even hug, we came up with the "bum-bum" greeting[7].

ER DOCTOR No. 5
Listen to this, listen to this! One night, I was driving home on the empty highway, and the police stopped me...
I pulled over, and a very stern officer got out and said, "You!!!"
Silence
"I made a bet with my colleague that you work at the hospital. Is it true?"
ER NURSE No. 2
But it's not funny...

ER NURSE No. 4
And the lady who confused the CPAP helmet with the hairdryer one!?! Oh, she couldn't stop apologizing because she didn't have money for the hairstyling.
ER DOCTOR No. 6
Until someone told her that her daughter had already paid, and finally, she found peace in her heart...

THE INFECTIOUS DISEASE SPECIALIST
Speaking of hairstyle… let's talk about our colleague Carmelo, who kept wearing a cap all the time, night and day, for two months... and only when he removed it, we finally figured out why: (he messes up his hair) Carmelo! What happened to your hair? and he, calm: “Even President Mattarella[8] no longer goes to the hairdresser!”.

ER DOCTOR No. 8
Masks, gowns, head coverings. "From Giovanni Rana's factory[9]: Ladies and gentlemen, tortellini are on the menu today!"

[7] A doctor had invented a way of greeting his wife, also a doctor, by rubbing their backsides together, so as not to touch each other head-on and risk infecting each other.
[8] Sergio Mattarella is President of the Italian Republic.
[9] Giovanni Rana is a famous brand of tortellini and Italian pasta.

ER NURSE No. 1
And what about how much we ate? They sent us food at all hours...

ER DOCTOR No. 9
Well, come on, they were gifts.

ER NURSE No. 1
... yes, but after kebabs, Neapolitan´s Pastiera and gorgonzola pizza... thank goodness we all had masks!

ER Doctor number Six puts her hand in her pocket, finds a paper crane, and looks at it.
Then everyone puts their hands in their pockets, takes their crane between their fingers, and exits the stage, almost carried away by the crane.
Then, everybody exits the scene.

SCENE 24 – And he sings

The music plays "Una furtiva lacrima", an aria from "L'elisir d'amore" by Gaetano Donizetti.
On stage, remain ER Doctor Number One and a singer.

ER DOCTOR No. 1
There was a boy who was 17, or maybe he was 19. I hope he's still there.
Admitted to the ward for a few days with the CPAP helmet.
At some point, he has a sudden worsening of respiratory function.
So, he's taken to the Shock Room.
I am there and welcome him.
He has Oxygen at very high flows. But saturated less than 90%.
And he sings.

A SINGER
Singing
Una furtiva lagrima
Negli occhi suoi spuntò
Quelle festose giovani
Invidiar sembrò
Che più cercando io vo?
Che più cercando io vo?

ER DOCTOR No. 1
It's not a miracle and just brain hypoxia.
I'm looking for a pulmonary embolism.
But the embolism is not there.
I'm looking for the heart.
I can not see it.
I'm looking for the lungs.

I can't even see those.

In their place, there is a wall.
A black wall of impenetrable air
Part of the chest is filled with air.
And it plays a dangerous game of pressure.
As a result, he could die of cardiac arrest.
But instead, he sings.

A SINGER
Singing
Che più cercando io vo?
Che più cercando io vo?

ER DOCTOR No. 1
We decide to intubate him and then attempt chest decompression manoeuvres.
The procedure must be speedy.
We remove the helmet. Put on a mask with a high percentage of oxygen.
We explain to him that we have to intubate him.

We explain to him that we will put him to sleep.
That when he's better, we'll wake him up.
He continues to sing.

A SINGER
Singing with vocalisation

ER DOCTOR No. 1
We are ready!
Medicines.
Pipe in hand.
Now you will be sleepy.

The music slowly fades away, and the lights go out.

Review of *The Inheritor: A Play* by Théâtre de l'Aquarium. Translated by Kate Bredeson and Thalia Wolff. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2025. xxxvii + 55 pp.

Reviewed by Daniel Smith

The Inheritor is an important activist play about education and privilege, presenting a stylized competition between two students attempting to earn admission to a prestigious French university. The wealthy Inheritor is given every advantage, praised and coddled when underprepared, and ultimately taught to bully and oppress his working-class Non-Inheritor counterpart. The non-realistic stage world proceeds through a series of games, memories, and dream sequences, shaped by twin choruses of Students and birdlike Professors. This book provides an excellent English-language translation of the French text along with engaging editorial apparatus covering historical context and production strategies.

Bredeson's introductory essay grounds the project in her scholarly work on theatre and protest in Paris during the uprisings of May 1968. (Kate Bredeson, *Occupying the Stage: The Theater of May '68*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2018). The production history of this play is fascinating: initially performed at the École Normale Supérieure on May 3 and 4, the production pivoted to touring occupied schools because protests and the police response made it impossible to continue as planned. Théâtre de l'Aquarium began as a student group interested in collective creation and practice-based research. *The Inheritor* draws on documentary evidence, inspired in particular by the work of sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, whose book *Les Héritiers: les étudiants et la culture* was published in 1964. (Available in English translation as *The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relations to Culture.* Trans. Richard Nice. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.)

This Introduction also offers a detailed discussion of the translation process that will be of particular interest to readers of *The Mercurian*. Bredeson demonstrates an awareness of the collaborative nature of theatre translation, having sought out collaborators whose expertise compliments her own. Consultant Joelle Rameau offered expertise in French language and culture that led to some specific choices, while co-translator Thalia Wolff brought a perspective as a twenty-first century undergraduate student well-equipped to explore the play's resonance with contemporary issues in U.S. higher education. Bredeson identifies a number of dramaturgical challenges for translating the culture of French higher education with its high-stakes entrance and *agrégation* examinations. She further discusses sensitivity toward gender, race, and religion in this translation, as well as decisions about translating slang terms and using Simon Says as an equivalent for a French children's game. Analyzing the play's engagement with questions of religion, and the framing of higher education as salvation, Bredeson explicates France's policy of official secularism (*laïcité*) as context. A vexing stage direction about an alarm clock leads into a discussion of the play's engagement with absurdist aesthetics and didacticism. Bredeson concludes the essay by invoking the play's activist engagement, both in its own tumultuous historical moment and in terms of its potential for inciting conversation and change today.

A second introductory section featuring Thalia Wolff's reflections on working as both co-translator and director offers additional fruitful context for this piece. Wolff describes decisions

made regarding casting and doubling that were effective for the circumstances of a staged reading at Reed College, along with a collaborative rehearsal process in which ideas from actors were taken seriously to inform the staging. Her directorial interpretation focused on the contrast between the Inheritor and the Non-Inheritor, while creating a stage world featuring many strange elements. Wolff's evocative discussion of the Bird-Professors' flapping and perching movement might inspire similar choices from other directors who stage this script.

The introductory materials evince a combination of careful attention to cultural and historical context with a view toward rendering a theatrically viable and resonant script for the present moment. These qualities are borne out in the translation itself, which achieves a consistent theatrical register that balances distance and proximity in productive ways. The gamified competition plays out in terms familiar to U.S. audiences: Blind Man's Buff, the aforementioned Simon Says, and card games including poker and War. The Non-Inheritor's befuddled participation in such games in hopes of economic advancement might resonate with contemporary audiences in relation to the television series *Squid Game*. But the text also preserves the specificity of French educational culture in a number of ways. A section skewering the formulaic structures of French essay writing remains easily accessible in English. Portions involving French pronunciation and pedagogical practices around reciting poetry are more complicated. Directors and dramaturgs working on this script would need to make decisions about how to pronounce names like Victor Hugo and Jules Ferry, where an Americanized pronunciation would have a different rhythm than a French pronunciation. A similar challenge arises in the scene where the Elementary School Teacher teaches vowel sounds: should the actor name the vowels in English or French?

The Inheritor has tremendous potential to incite significant dialogue in college and university communities. In a classroom setting, this play would pair very well with Luis Valdez's *No Saco Nada de la Escuela* (1969), which employs similar techniques to satirize white privilege in the U.S. educational system. For a departmental production season, the large (but flexible) cast size is an important asset. Wolff offers a doubling scheme allowing for a cast of 15 to play nearly 40 roles. A fully designed production would provide excellent opportunities for student or faculty designers, particularly in the areas of costume design and sound design. I know of one staged reading organized by Jane Barnette at the University of Kansas in December 2024, and I am confident that more readings and productions of this provocative play will follow.

Daniel Smith is Associate Professor of Theatre Studies at Michigan State University. While on sabbatical, he is spending the spring 2025 semester as the Martha Daniel Newell Visiting Scholar at Georgia College and State University. His scholarly and creative interests include seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French theatre, dramaturgy, adaptation, and translation studies. Dan has published articles, translations, and reviews in *L'Esprit Créateur*, *Performing Arts Resources*, *The Mercurian*, *Translation Review*, *Brecht Yearbook*, and *Theatre Topics*. He has served as editor of the journal *Theatre/Practice*.

Review of *The Entremés for Performance: Translations of One-Act Plays from Golden Age Spain*, ed. Kerry K. Wilks and Ian M. Borden. Aris & Phillips Hispanic Classics, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2024.

Reviewed by Kathleen Jeffs, D.Phil., Gonzaga University

To those theatre practitioners, educators, and scholars sifting for gold amid a dizzying array of possibilities within the Spanish Golden Age canon, this book provides a whole pan of valuable nuggets. The *entremés* (one-act play historically performed in between the acts of a full-length play) is such a gem of a form for performance and classroom work because it is short, often funny or poignant, and always approachable for audiences and students due to its get-in-and-get-out jokes and stagecraft. This collection, edited by the formidably talented Kerry Wilks and Ian Borden, represents a trove of speakable, studyable translations. The breadth of both the types of one-act plays included and the authors selected provides an entirely new scope for understanding this unique genre's range of possibilities.

The plays themselves are fully contextualized and grounded in historical and dramaturgical context, and span from the "forerunners of the genre (Encina, Lope de Rueda) and also writers who wrote as the genre was transitioning in the late 17th and early 18th century" (Zamora, Cabañas). Some are familiar, such as Cervantes's *El retablo de las maravillas* here in a lively performance translation as *The Ark of Wonders* by Borden and Costales, and the requisite presence of Juan Rana in Calderón de la Barca's *El toreador / Bullfighter for a Day*, while others are perhaps less well-known such as Vélez de Guevara's *Antonia y Perales / Antonia and Perales*, which Erdman translates in rhyming couplets in a strategy designed to "restore the wit and verve 'lost in translation' through the sheer pleasure of rhyme". There is a very interesting play with a *Sweeney Todd* vibe in Quevedo's *La ropavejera / Secondhand Rose Shop,* in which "a person who sells used clothes, is actually selling body parts and other remedies to help her customers maintain a youthful appearance". This play in particular makes a strong example of how performance testing benefits the ultimate product in that readers can be privy to workshop and performance options as well as literary choices. Many of the plays in the volume have been either workshopped or performed at the Association of Hispanic Classical Theatre's annual conferences in El Paso. The methodology for those translation workshops are outlined in the play's illuminatingly process-laden introduction (including detailed examples of the translation group delving into how a pause or an emphasis on a certain word in the delivery of the line makes all the difference; in this case, the translation magic is in a tactical silence, not in a word choice, which is a wonderful moment for students and translation scholars to unpack).

The book is in facing pages of English and Spanish, which is highly enjoyable for those of us who want to see how the sausage is made, as we can see the choices laid bare throughout the "decoding process" on the pages and laugh along with the jokes in both languages. The section on "Decoding and Recoding" in the introduction to Gunter's translation of *La capeadora / The Cape Snatcher* is fascinating, with its deep dramaturgical process of revisitation, transplantation, substitution, expansion, and a focus on the culminating finale that helps the reader appreciate the translators' work and the play itself all the more. That play is a *tour de force* of the genre, with everything you could want in bawdiness, physical action, linguistic pyrotechnics and two alternatives to choose from for the final song sequence, including one set to Shakira's "Hips

Don't Lie". Yancey's version of *Los putos / Jinxed* offers another juicy play that he rightly quips "one might easily imagine appearing in an episode of *Saturday Night Live*". That play is by Jerónimo de Cáncer whose works haven't become as well-known perhaps as those of his collaborator, Augustín Moreto, so this is a welcome example of the educational aspect of the book. Yancey's explication of the sorcery and departure from the typical tradition of ending these plays with music is appreciated also in the spirit of educating the reader about how this unique play both is typical and not typical of its sort. That script in particular seems to have a flow and a naturalness to it that is typical of Yancey's performance-oriented translation work. Magic also flows through Francisco Bernardo de Quirós's *El muerto, Eufrasia y Tronera (El muerto)* which Wilks and Worthington have endearingly titled *Dead or Wed* (familiar to readers of *The Mercurian* as it was published here in 2018) and continues with Moreto's witchy *Entremés famoso de las brujas / The Famous Interlude of the Witches* in a delightful version by Nieto-Cuebas and Vargas Ramos, which balances the meter of the Spanish with an English version of the slang, bravely solving translation challenges that would flummox the best in the field, for example, "words in English that one could confuse with necromancer", etc.

Mention needs to be made of the contributions, both overt and behind the scenes, of Susan Paun de García and Harley Erdman, whose translations and generous assistance to their collaborators shine throughout. As the embodiment of the indefatigable spirit of the *entremés* himself, Ben Gunter, graces the cover and his energy permeates the volume. His contribution reaches new heights in the section "Classic Doubletakes: Second Looks, Three Times Over" in which the volume takes a turn toward adaptation, relocation, and his invocation of Susan Jonas's delicious articulation of our project as translators: "The classics provoke paradoxical feelings, from reverence to repudiation, and this friction is gold" (Jonas, "Aiming the Canon at Now: Strategies for Adaptation", in *Dramaturgy in American Theatre: A Sourcebook*, p. 245). In introducing these "doubletakes" Gunter invites us to appreciate the fact that "variety in the responses that these plays arouse increases their capacity to qualify as 'classics'." And as if that weren't quite enough to chew on, there follows an appendix of pedagogical materials that will open seams of inquiry, discussion, comprehension, critical thinking, and staging experiments in classrooms and studios for years to come.

There are little tasty treats embedded into the educational introduction to each play and in the copious notes that are just as valuable as the plays themselves, so don't skip the descriptions of "translating the script's syncopated, sonorous, spicily dialectical verse" or the rich footnotes that bring the references to life. To cover such depth and breadth results in a good-sized tome if you can get your hands on the physical book, which I recommend over the electronic version for ease of digestion. This reviewer highly recommends taking the editors' advice to "Enjoy them. Argue with them. Put the play onstage and test them out" as they have in creating this volume of workshop-developed, performance-tested works of short theatrical exuberance. You won't be disappointed.

Kathleen Jeffs, D.Phil., serves as Associate Provost for Assessment, Accreditation, and Programs at Gonzaga University, where she also served as Professor and Chair for the Department of Theatre & Dance, and Director of the University Core. Kathleen's research areas focused on the performance of Spanish Golden Age drama in translation. Her post-doctoral research assistantship with Jonathan Thacker was a virtual environment geared for theatre

practitioners and educators to spark new performances of Spanish drama in English translation, Out of the Wings (www.outofthewings.org). Publications include an analysis of her time with the Royal Shakespeare Company: *Staging the Spanish Golden Age: Translation and Performance* (Oxford University Press, 2018) and a new translation of *The Force of Habit* (La fuerza de la costumbre) by Guillén de Castro (Liverpool University Press, ed. Machit, 2019). Latterly she and Suzanne Ostersmith published a textbook, *Interdisciplinary Arts: Integrating Dance, Theatre, and Visual Arts* (Human Kinetics, 2022).

Review of *The Plays of Aristide Tarnagda: Contemporary Francophone Theatre from Burkina Faso* Edited and Translated by Heather Jeanne Denyer and Anna G.R. Miller, Methuen Drama, 2025

Reviewed by Sophie Siegel-Warren

The Plays of Aristide Tarnagda: Contemporary Francophone Theatre from Burkina Faso, edited by Heather Jeanne Denyer and Anna G.R. Miller, presents six plays by the award-winning Burkinabè theatre artist Aristide Tarnagda in English translation. The volume includes an introduction by Denyer, followed by her translations of *Red Earth*, *Ways of Loving*, *Sank, or the Patience of the Dead*, and *Musika*, along with Miller's translations of *And If I Killed Them All, Ma'am?* And *Tears from the August Sky.*

Tarnagda was born in 1983 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso—the same city where he attended University and fell in love with theater, beginning as an actor in 1999. Tarnagda transitioned to directing before he discovered his passion for writing during a 2004 playwriting workshop with Ivorian playwright Koffi Kwahulé. In 2013, his first two plays, *And If I Killed Them All, Ma'am?* and *Tears from the August Sky*, were published and performed in French at The Festival les Francophonies in Limoges and at the Avignon Festival. In 2016, *Sank, or the Patience of the Dead* was published and had its world premiere at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Belgium. In 2017, Tarnagda won the Grand Prix de littéraire d'Afrique noire for the collectively published *Red Earth* and *Ways of Loving,* both of which premiered at the Limoges Festival. *Musika* – which had been nominated for the Radio France Internationale prize for Best Play – had its world premiere in 2018 at the Récréâtrales Festival in Ouagadougou.

As is evidenced by the robust international performance history of all six plays in this collection, Tarnagda's work has reached audiences around the French speaking world for over a decade. This anthology does the necessary work of bringing his oeuvre to anglophone theater. Moreover, Denyer and Miller wisely link the plays to their performance histories by publishing separately authored introductions to each play—also translated into English by the editors—by individuals representing a range of touchpoints with Tarnagda's work: scholar Dr. Fatou Ghislaine Sanou (*Sank)*, 2018 Récréâtrales Festival Director Odile Sankara (*Musika*), the playwright himself (*And if*), and actors who starred in their respective plays: Ramatou Ouédraogo (*Tears*), Kiswend-sida Urbain Guiguemdé (*Red Earth*), Lionelle Edoxi Gnoula and Safourata Kaboré (*Ways*). These structural and editorial choices speak to Denyer and Miller's approach to translation as a form of dramaturgy, one that keeps the embodiment of the text and ultimate goal of performance at the forefront. Denyer and Miller acknowledge the important legacy of oral performance in Tarnagda's work, highlighting how a translator must, as translator Marjolijn de Jager suggests, "be able to hear when reading, particularly as the nature of African theatre texts is intricately connected to oral traditions involving music." In this way, Denyer and Miller argue, the oral nature of the work can be "recaptured as it will be by performers on the stage."

The anthology is organized chronologically, following Tarnagda's shifting style from earlier works featuring a single speaker and reckoning with the personal as political (*And If I Killed Them All, Ma'am, Tears from the August Sky, Red Earth,* and *Ways of Loving*) to his later ensemble pieces, reckoning with the explicitly political as personal (*Sank, or the Patience of the*

Dead and *Musika*). While some of the translations in the collection have been published previously, presenting them together enables the reader to appreciate how Tarnagda is untying a knot through his writing, working at interrelated questions through different angles and perspectives. This happens literally, as with explicit companion pieces *And If I Killed Them All, Ma'am* and *Tears from the August Sky,* in which Lamine (in *Killed*) and his unnamed pregnant girlfriend (in *Tears*) both speak in continuous monologues to a woman in a car – addressed only as "ma'am" – who never appears on stage. And it also happens thematically, as with *Red Earth* and *Ways of Loving*, monologue plays written for a single actor who speaks as two members of a family. Both plays additionally traffic in the complexity of family memory, in which the realities of physical task of writing weigh heavy (the fraught act of letter writing between brothers in *Red Earth* and the social alienation faced by the left-handed girl in *Ways*). The splitting of the double character into a single body exemplifies the question posed by Kiswend-sida Urbain Guiguemdé in his preface to *Red Earth*: "Can you leave-somewhere without really leaving it behind? Can your body separate from your soul?"

While technically a monologue play, *Ways of Loving* has also been performed as a two-hander, and this invitation to a second performer, as well as the play's courtroom setting, marks Tarnagda's transition from a single speaker in an unspecified locale to plays that feature larger casts in more explicitly political environments. In *Sank, or the Patience of the Dead*, Tarnagda resurrects Thomas Sankara – the Burkinabè military officer and Marxist revolutionary leader who chose the name Burkina Faso, or "land of the upright people" –staging Sankara's final days leading up to his assassination. In *Musika*, the anthology's final play, Tarnagda turns to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to dramatize the catastrophe of environmental exploitation. Echoing questions posed in *Red Earth,* Tarnagda personalizes the environmental devastation through his characters' agony over staying or going; Musika is determined to remain tied to her sacred homeland and its blessings, while her love, Simba, tries to convince her to leave. *Musika* echoes Tarnagda's earlier monologue plays in the character of Choryphaeus, a narrator who speaks directly to the audience, addressing them in the original French plays in English, as "Ladies and Gentlemen." Choryphaeus encourages the audience to laugh and feel at ease, as they enjoy their "Reality Theatre"—which, he clarifies, is not meant to make them feel bad, but rather to entertain. Yet Choryphaeus keeps slipping, at one point declaring: "Do you hear those screams in the coltan of your TVs? Of your cell phones?..." before apologizing, "Excuse me, you're not here for politics, but for magic." While in *Kill* and *Tears*, the audience's implication is merely a suggestion, in *Musika,* audience complicity is laid bare.

Part of Tarnagda's personal and deeply human way into the largescale economic and environmental wreckage of colonialism is through his characters' shared, continuous love for the physical land, the earth of their home, that co-exists with immense suffering, violence, poverty, and loss. His plays are laced with smells of rain and mud, sounds of birds, and movement of familiar animals. "I just want to go watch the dove caress the sky with its wings," laments the girl in *Ways of Loving.* "The earth that holds my story, the earth that holds my dead, the earth that holds the trees, the flowers, the mountains, the waters, the earth that holds my home, our homes," recalls one brother in *Red Earth.* "We were gazing up at the stars that light the sky with their white teeth," remembers Lamine's girlfriend in *Tears from an August Sky.* "Listen to the sky. Listen to the river. Listen to the trees. Listen to space. Listen to the unknown," says Simba in *Musika*. Tarnagda lets these odes sing while ensuring his audience understands the particular

pain and violence of colonial deprivation and exploitation. As the girl in *Ways of Loving* declares: “Africans are forced to leave, seeing as they were dispossessed of everything and now they’re without forests, without seas, without oil, without land, without cotton.”

One of the anthology’s strengths as a work of theatrical translation are Miller and Denyer’s shared success in rendering Tarnagda’s pacing, the rhythm of which provides the plays with implied stage directions of sorts. In *And If I Killed Them All, Ma’am?*, the speech’s tempo acts as the play’s conductor, steering the speaker’s moments of calm or activation: “Everyone waits at some point. Everyone waits for a bit of bread. A bit of familiarity. A bit of a dream. A bit of sun. A bit of rain. A bit of land. A bit of peace.” Here, Miller relies on alliteration and staccato syllables, allowing the speaker to start out pensive and driving him towards desperation. Denyer achieves a similar rhythmic momentum by foregrounding Tarnagda’s effective use of repetition in her translation *Red Earth*. “The mosquitos abandon the corpses/The dogs abandon their watch/An explosion of dew on the grass/An explosion of hesitant voices.” There are other moments, however, where the language was less clearly rendered, specifically when the translators toggle back and forth between the singular and plural in a way that frequently trips the rhythm, or when certain word choices muddle the poeticism. When transitioning from *Red Earth*‘s verse stanzas into its prose, for example, Denyer’s translation loses some of the care displayed in her verse translation: “With mosquitoes in the houses, in the fields, in the wells, it’s impossible for us not to catch a nasty disease. Despite the warm weather, our bodies would become extremely feverish.” Why ‘nasty’ – a word that has adopted a whole host of cultural connotations in English in recent years; similarly, why ‘extremely,’ a word that, coupled with the conditional tense, carries extra syllables that provide unnecessary stumbles for the performer.

All six plays are centered on the question of individual’s actions. As Tarnagda himself writes, his work is rooted in characters who face “dire situations where they have to make tough choices, where they have to define themselves and take charge of their fate. They can’t be indifferent.” This challenge extends to his audience, using the necessitated activation of his characters to compel his audiences to wake from their indifference and even, perhaps, contemplate their own complicity.

Sophie Siegel-Warren (she/her) is a dramaturg, translator, producer, and researcher for creative projects. She recently received her Doctorate in Dramaturgy from the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale for her dissertation, a French-to-English collection of plays from German-Occupied Paris that includes Claude Vermorel’s *Jeanne avec nous,* Jean Paul Sartre’s *Les Mouches,* and Jean Anouilh’s *Antigone*. As a script consultant and dramaturg, Sophie has worked on over thirty film and theater scripts for screenwriters and playwrights including Tori Sampson and Pulitzer Prize finalists Fake Friends, and for institutions including multidisciplinary creative studio DreamCrew, Yale Repertory Theatre, Ma-Yi Theater Company, and The Guthrie Theater. Sophie was previously a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Drama, Theater, and Dance Department at Queens College and is currently the Development Manager and Associate Producer for site-specific theater company En Garde Arts in New York City.

Review of *Contemporary Performance Translation. Challenges and Opportunities for the Global Stage.* Jean Graham-Jones, Cambridge University Press, 2024.

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At the very beginning of *Contemporary Performance Translation. Challenges and Opportunities for the Global Stage*, Jean Graham-Jones' celebrates translation as a collaborative practice. The book then goes on to share with us the development of the author's collaborative practice, "the culmination of a career-long devotion to the inseparability of artistic practice and critical reflection" (ix). This is a book that is imbued with intellectual and creative generosity, taking the reader on a journey through Graham-Jones's practice that, as the title suggests, challenges ways of thinking about performance and translation, and proposes ways in which we enact translation knowledge and practice in different environments.

It would be an injustice to define the term "translational" here, but key to understanding it as practice and process is Graham-Jones' early insistence on how the "translational works conceptually and practically to retain copresence and multidirectionality so that translations do not erase the so-called original but rather stand in relation to other texts and performances" (5). Setting the scene, the introduction and first chapter ("Translationality in Performance") lead the reader in a consideration of some of the dominant theories around translation and performance translation. What distinguishes this work from other such accounts is a profound sense of engagement with global voices, so that we are immediately beyond certain orthodoxies of thought and practice and engaging with the ideas of theorists with the capacity to shift the axis of our thinking and with practitioners who enact translationality as a collaborative performance practice. Chapter Two, simply put, is a sharing of the development of Graham-Jones' translational practice through her collaborations with Argentine dramatists Claudio Tolcachir, Lola Arias and Rafael Spregelburd. With the evocative ideas of "The Over-translated, the Under-translated, the Untranslatable, and the Limits of Performance Translation", the chapter is a brilliant insight into the ways in which the author has travelled with the complexities of the specific demands of each play and performance and has worked with the processes across time and in different contexts. The sense of the development of practice is enlightening, and there is a real density (in the best sense of the word) in the understanding of the demands of each play, of how they work in different locations, of how with questions of the translational approach might guide the collaborative process in the new site of encounter, the place where the negotiations of co-presence and multidirectionality take place.

Then, in Chapter 3, "Translationality and the Atypical Actor in Performance", Graham-Jones opens up the possibilities of thinking through the translational approach. Rooted again in the author's practice, the chapter tests the approach in relation to "the performer's own body – mine and others' – as a collaboratively translational site" (89). Thinking primarily of the "atypical actor", this chapter is an exploration of how "translation can be thought differently – other than as metaphor or method – when considering performers with multiple and varied, visible and invisible, abilities" (88). The approach, following Donna Marie Nudd's challenge to an "ethic of accommodation" (94), proposes demanding changes to core ways of working with disability. While placing her practice in the context of different models of disability, Graham-Jones' account demonstrates the work involved in opening routes and spaces of difference in scenarios

of inclusion and integration. One example is how "access devices" are fully integrated into the imagined mise-en-scène and a play's "fundamental dramaturgy" (99). The final chapter, "Translationality and the Decolonial Gesture in Performance" proposes translationality as an inherently decolonial gesture. Following complex traces of the performance and reception of racial and ethnic constructions, Graham-Jones again uses her own experience, this time as a spectator, to guide the reader through performance aesthetics, contexts and moments of change in Argentine theatre, aware of the "discontinuities, ruptures, and dismantlings" (121) of the decolonial gesture. The power of the chapter lies in the way Graham-Jones' considerable scholarship meets her consciousness of experiential and intellectual subjectivity and the constant need to be aware of our own positionality. Here, we see the enactment of the author's insistence throughout on translational multiplicity, on moving in many directions, open to challenge, obstacles and, at times, to failures. Translationality opens us up to the potential in these experiences.

I had the great pleasure of hearing Jean Graham-Jones present this book at the Royal Central School of Speech & Drama in London, UK. Her presentation was characterised by the inclusive way in which she brought her audience into her thinking and practice. It was then a delight to turn to a book that is rich in connections, placing scholarly knowledge in the multiplicity of collaborative actions that performance for translation demands. For scholars and practitioners new to the field, the early chapters are a brilliant guide to a wide range of thinking and practice on translation and performance. For scholars who know the field, the revisiting of theories will be a welcome challenge. The later chapters push the boundaries of the field of translation, demonstrating how a translational approach can help us to find the languages and ways of working that actively look in multiple ways to shape our practice. The book is full of inspiring instances of how to move beyond the textual in translation and is translational in its agile movement across disciplines and practice and its evidencing of the complexity, challenges and potential of the approach. *Contemporary Performance Translation. Challenges and Opportunities for the Global Stage* is a fascinating and enlightening account of a life's work as educator, academic, translator, performer, theatre spectator, all of which feed into the experiences from which the analysis arises. This is the multiplicity of scholarship at its more illuminating – an invitation to revisit theory and practice, to read again, to find new interlocutors and to engage in a translational way, conscious of the labour involved in ever-changing "sites of encounter" where "the local negotiations are never-ending" (5). The book is a precious offering to our interlocking scholarly worlds.

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