

# BUILT TO BLAST

*... again and again and again ...*

I have a new practice. It is still forming itself. It is an entangled, continuous moving-perceiving in different situations in space and time. My practice is derived and developed from Jeanine Durning's continuous movement exercises that are all based on non-stop moving and sometime have additional tasks and layers (also speaking) on top to challenge perception. I work with the basic form of »simply« continuous moving and perceiving. I find the exploration of perception itself very complex and enriching, so my research has so far focused on that part, whereas I am only starting to grasp which role the movement plays in this undertaking.

*»All perception [...] is intrinsically active. And all perception is intrinsically thoughtful.«<sup>1</sup> (Alva Noë)*

Prior to stumbling onto this new practice, I started a research in Summer last year from looking at a *thing* that I could not quite name, but that has many names and faces, such as milieu, environment, urban space, context, work life, private life, social surrounding, nature – just to come to an early conclusion that this *thing* does not exist, and that therefore there is no name for it and also none of the mentioned faces exist. Instead, there is a big hole. A void that seems scary at first but that also bears a chance to look at the world in a different way. This hole can be approached from many angles. I am trying to open it up from several perspectives.

**To open up the »big hole«, I am aiming to unlearn perception as I have known it so far. It is to unlearn categories, labels and patterns that I have learned and trained throughout my whole life to simplify and structure the world around me into something understandable, coherent and rather stable. I guess this is what we usually do in order not to go nuts.**

So I am trying to keep sanity while venturing towards its very borders. There are a lot of notions that I am dealing with at the same time, notions that are interrelated and are making it hard to single out one of them without having talked about the others. Thus the interweaving structure of this essay. Still, there will certainly be questions, unframed thoughts and abstract concepts hovering over one's mind while reading. I hope that these will turn out to be not only disturbing, but enriching, that they will inform each other through the linking together of different parts, relying on the reader's ability and agency to move back and forward in the text.

I had set out my research proposal as follows:

*»As an individual in the group (my class; my friends; the society I live in) I want to train the permeability of losing and finding my center in an articulated collective process. The autopoietic loop of [unfolding folding unfolding etc.] my **self** in a larger organism – economically, emotionally, rationally, virtually – drives me to the question of how I am made by my environment and how I make my environment. Spaces that we move and live in are heavily normalized towards a certain way of being, effective on many layers (how we sense, move, have sex, make performances, spend our lives). I want to examine bodily intelligence in urban space (the entity that is commonly divided into the dichotomy of public and private), such as the closed space of the dance studio in relation to the closed space of a public train or bus, in search of a utopian togetherness of human and non-human subjects.«*

In an unexpected way I have found access to pretty much all of these questions and interests from two new angles that support and sustain my research interest from a profound layer of existence.

**The continuous movement, continuous talking, perceiving and awareness exercises that I did with Jeanine Durning on the one hand...**

...and the book »The Ecological Thought« by Timothy Morton (recommended by my mentor Siegmar Zacharias) on the other hand

undermine my initial approach in a way that gives new relevance to my questions and integrates them into a bigger frame.

But I want to start off with examining the language that has made use of me (or I have been making use of?) in my recent artistic work preceding this essay.

»Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language,  
while in fact language remains the master of man.«<sup>2</sup>

(Martin Heidegger)

I can agree with Heidegger only to some extent. I came to realise that terminology always comes with strong paradigms that need to be identified and faced to each other in order to see what lies yonder. I am more and more inclined to direct my attention to that which lies beyond, the other, the ungraspable, the unspeakable, that lies beyond language. Or rather to give the same attention to all the other things that are floating together with the language-things in the *mesh* – on a different layer than the power dichotomy suggested by Heidegger.

**In other words, I am working on a way of sense making other than written, spoken or thought language. A way of being (with) the world through perceiving and continuous moving that is purely haptic, visual, aural, sensual and that is not looking for purpose, meaning or efficiency.**

My recent performance research has dealt with the notion of *place* (der Ort) in different ways, resulting in two rather contrasting performances – the intimate one-on-one performance installation BUILT TO BLAST and the globally scaled video score project GO TO THE BUS STOP THAT IS CLOSEST TO THE PLACE WHERE YOU SLEPT LAST NIGHT. Both very much deal with the construction and deconstruction of characteristic spaces. In BUILT TO BLAST it is always a closed, confined built space (a *room*) that receives agency to speak, act and feel like a »person«. A coherent *identity* of the room is assumed, fostered and communicated to the visitor. In GO TO THE BUS STOP the bus stops are listed as performers in the credits, along with the 24 human performers involved. A movement score linking together both a named, identifiable space (bus stop) through a video clip with a dancer on stage. So far I have assumed places to be able to hold identities, in a similar way as people can hold identities.

Having come across new influences and inputs since, along with this current and ongoing research, both terms *place* and *identity*, politically and philosophically charged with history and Weltanschauung (I explicitly refrain from going into these), have become troublesome if not deceptively corrupted to me. So in the following, let's have a look at the bare origin of the two words that I have more or less explicitly been dealing with in my previous performance research and that I seem to have intuitively avoided in the abstract for this essay. Uncannily, by getting rid of *place* and *identity*, I am taking away the ground that I have built on before, not knowing how much of it will get destroyed, how much can shift and if there are new seeds sprouting that can inform my previous work retrospectively (in another research).

**In this way, individual movement patterns come through, linked with an openness for the surprising, the uncanny, the strange other.**

During my architecture studies I came across Martin Heidegger's notion of a place (a *site*, German: *der Ort*). In his infamous lecture *Bauen Wohnen Denken* (Building Dwelling Thinking) Heidegger goes to the roots of the German verbs *sein* (to be) and *bauen* (to build), which both trace back to *buan*, Old German for dwelling. He says »[...] dwelling, that is, as being on the earth«; he later asks »In what way does building belong to dwelling?« and comes up with the example of the bridge for a building that gathers the »fourfold« (a central aspect of dwelling that Heidegger made up) into a *place* (*Ort*), rendering the »already there« elements of »Nature« into a location.

»The bridge gathers to itself in its own way earth and sky, divinities and mortals. Gathering or assembly, by an ancient word of our language, is called "thing." The bridge is a thing – and, indeed, it is such as the gathering of the fourfold [...]«<sup>3</sup> (M. Heidegger)

**My currently forming movement practice works against this. Not to negate the notion of thingness as gathering itself, that Heidegger reminds us of; but to break the seal of the *already gathered* in favour of a new kind of perception based on ephemerality.**

Heidegger's word-digging got me interested in looking up the origin of *thing*, and according to *thesaurus.com* it is even more adventurous:

»thing, Old English þing "meeting, assembly," later "entity, being, matter" (subject of deliberation in an assembly), also "act, deed, event,

*material object, body, being," from P.Gmc. \*thengan "appointed time").«*

I very much welcome back all these enriching notions into the term *thing*, that add a new layer to current theories I have recently dealt with. Graham Harman's speculative realism gives subjectivity to things outside human perception, Jane Bennett's vibrancy of matter even gives agency to objects, the call of things, and in Karen Barad's entanglements of spacetime mattering matter is born, lives and dies. Let's stay with Barad for a moment. In her theory particles are now *quanta* (= certain amount) of a field, like a photon is an amount of light. The void is no longer a sterile vacuum, but a living, breathing non/being. And then there are *virtual particles*, that exist outside of time and space on the edge of non/being. In her layout of quantum theory infinities are an integral part of the system: an electron-self-energy takes the form of an electron, that then exchanges a virtual photon... with itself! We witness »intrinsic perversions of the electron's self-energy«, a moral violation, at the same time touching oneself and being touched by oneself. The very notion of itself / its self is queered. What is more, all touching includes an infinite number of possibilities, touching the other meaning touching all others, including oneself. So we are dealing with an »infinite polymorphous perversity«.

**Barad's theory is close to my evolving practice. I want to queer the notion of my *self*. In my movement exercises I treat perception as touching everything including myself at the same time. That means in seeing one detail, seeing everything else, as well as myself, is always included. The challenge is not to get stuck with one thing as a closed, preconceived entity (e.g. a door) while seeing (hearing, touching...), but to include all other things that it is interconnected with it.**

*»We have the impression that the world is represented in full detail in consciousness because wherever we look, we encounter detail.«<sup>4</sup> (Alva Noë)*

Nothing, no *thing* exists detached from the mesh of things in the world. This will later bring us to Timothy Morton's ecological thought. But first I want to go back to the earlier usages of the word *thing*, especially the derivation of *thing* from *thengan* as *appointed time* is quite telling for what I want to suggest. What I am contesting in Heidegger though is the thing as a gathering of the allegedly *already known*, preconceived, thousands of times repeated perception of similar gatherings (as if *the*

*bridge as such* had ever existed). I am trying to reach back to the *thing* as an *act* (language shifts through its usage over time), the *deed* of putting things together, of interconnecting »living and non-living things«<sup>5</sup> (Timothy Morton).

**The practising person seems to cumulate in a kind of »pure«, naïve, »truly personal« quality of being in space and time, revealing a strong sense of what we often call musicality. I have clearly observed this in my fellows Tabea, Renen and Liselotte, among others, that have also derived artistic practices from Jeanine Durning.**

I see human individuals being entangled in the mesh of the world, with heightened awareness for the strange *other*, drawing their – what we call: – individuality from a constant quantitative positioning towards all other beings around them. So the common notion of individuality as something precious that *originates* from inside a being is challenged. In her moving and speaking practice, Tabea becomes »more than the sum of her movements and utterings«, while Renen’s new solo research shows parts of himself »that we haven’t seen in him before«.

It seems that the more we are actively (or radically passively?) entangled with the world, the more we see a heightened individual, an *original*. Just that the origin doesn’t lie in one point in space and time, but instead is the constantly changing result of innumerable entanglements in spacetime, a constant *becoming*.

**If everything, every *thing*, is a *gathering* of other *things*, I can, as an *event* (=thing), create a new *thing* (= *entity*, *body*, *being*, *matter*, *material object*), by making other interconnections than the ones that are commonly known and expected.**

With »known« I mean the ones I am trained, used, habituated to make. To see a bridge, a tree, a bike, a house as *entities* (= *things*) rather than seeing parts of these as a new *object* (=thing); to see a beam of steel with some green leaves, rubber and bricks (all already *entities* in themselves) as a »breebouse« – or whatever you would wanna call it.

**This is exactly what the practice that I am proposing to myself is trying to do. To see »breebouses« and »tridgeeks« instead of the ready-made entities that we already have words for. Or rather, not to see »breebouses«, but the one and only »breebouse«, and without even calling it that (as Jeanine Durning likes to remind: »The word is not**

**the thing. The thing is the thing.«) In my practice I am summoning a world without labels, without the illusion of coherence, stability and non-change.**

I am summoning a world of quanta (amounts) of *appointed time* (= *thengans*), where I want to redefine a »thing« as a *quantum of appointed time*, in order to already rename it – as a *situation*. For the sake of further semantic shifts, I consulted *thesaurus.com* again and found the following for the word »situation«: "*place, position, or location,*" and "*state of affairs*". The word cunningly embraces notions of space (place) and time (state). So my new *thing* is a *quantum of appointed time*, is a *situation*, is a *state of affairs*, or in the mash-up-version:

The thing *is* positioned affairs in time.

**The thing *does* positioned affairs in time.**

»Cognitive science suggests that our perception is quantized – it comes in little packets, not a continuous flow.«<sup>6</sup> (Timothy Morton)

**In consequence, my new *thing* eliminates the notion of a continuous identity (*thesaurus.com*: "*sameness*"; from *identidem*: "*over and over*") as a repeated *act* (= *thing*) of producing the same over and over again.**

A situation is *almost* unique, or, more precisely, given the vast amount of interconnections that constitute a situation, the probability that this exact situation is repeated even only once is *next to* infinitesimally small. The probability is so small that we cannot speak of an identity that is built on repeated sameness of some-*thing* (= *situation*) as a practically useful concept. And how useful is it to cling to something that is extremely unlikely to happen?

**I work with moving in different situations (formerly: places. Urban, public, private, nature, indoor, outdoor, transit, relaxation... spaces), filming myself with a wide angle camera. The camera frames a situation out of the mesh of possibilities. It gives a blurry border (as I never know exactly what is still in the picture and what not when filming) and orientation, a pivotal point to relate to when everything else has no direction or orientation.**

**Of course things *do* have orientation labelled on top of them, labels that I am striving to *unlearn*. The camera helps to unlearn by giving a new, almost externally placed orientation, like a teleport or wormhole**

to another spacetime situation. It also helps to channel through the gaze, puzzlement and curiosity of other humans (when practicing in the streets), as an anchor to something else than the human counterpart that I am socially trained to interact with. In other words, I am deprioritising human interaction, taking it to the same level as interaction with other *things* (=beings). So in a crucial way, my practice is letting go of *place* and *identity* in perceiving the world.

It is letting go of the idea of the *thing* as a fixed entity that has a name and that there are things that remain the same over time. Instead, my practice is opening up to the ever changing interconnectedness of things that are *beings* and *doings* (*deeds*) at the same time and that exist only for a quantum of appointed time. Nothing ever is the same as something else, not even the same as the thing itself, there is no *identity* (*sameness*) – but there are *similar* things, simulacra. Deleuze defines simulacra as...

»...those systems in which different relates to different by means of difference itself. What is essential is that we find in these systems no prior identity, no internal resemblance«<sup>7</sup>.

So my practice is dealing with difference rather than sameness.

»Interconnection implies separateness and difference.«<sup>8</sup> (T. Morton)

It is opening up to positioned affairs in time that have no preconceived shape, form, concept, appearance, function or *purpose*.

»Evolution shares pointlessness with art.« (T. Morton)

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So much for my attempt to shuffle paradigms carried by words. But it is the *thing* that I am trying to grasp in ever different words, the words are not the *thing*... So if Heidegger says in his lecture that »language remains the master of man«, I guess what I am trying is affirmative sabotage (an idea from Gayatri Spivak) when I am accepting language as a system that my thinking-perceiving cannot escape, while at the same time undermining it as just another *thing* that my being is entangled with in the mesh of things, a thing that keeps shifting and changing if I want it to.



Changing the system from within. In a radically decentralised way, I am the world («We are the world»), I am language, probably unescapably, but I can push some buttons to shape and shift it.

**My practice is also about finding and defining those buttons. One of them is to constantly redefine the same thing in other words, as I have tried above. At the same time, my practice is about avoiding to push any button, but to open up the shell of the machine and see what the buttons look like from inside.**

So, eventually, let's come to the idea of *situation* from that other viewpoint, from the angle of the ecological thought.

»There is no environment as such.«<sup>9</sup> (Timothy Morton)

– It's all distinct organic beings!

Foreground / background / body / mind / matter / ... – all are dissolved in the ecological thought. There are only interconnected beings in a mesh, no background. A *place* as such does not exist, since no part of the mesh can be detached from the rest of it without losing its entanglements that constitute the very things in the mesh. Cutting the interconnections implodes the things themselves to a zero degree. There is no *place* detached from the world. Every *place* contains all other *places*. (We know this thought of interconnectivity commonly as the butterfly effect: the flap of a butterfly's wing in Zimbabwe can be the initiation for a hurricane in Canada.) However, if a place then also is a being, subject to constant change, self-referential, in a constant being-doing (a cell reproducing itself [doing] through metabolism and bordering itself from the surrounding with its membrane [being]<sup>10</sup>) with all other beings, I have to let go of the term *place* itself as it summons the illusionary image of something stable, re-visitible, fixed in time and space. Quite literally, giving names to places (Alexanderplatz, my kitchen, the strip of coast behind those trees, ...) is projecting something stable, soothing, identifiable onto the uncanny fact of having to deal with ever changing *situations* that are actually highly complex and practically unpredictable due to the vast amount of factors and entanglements that constitute them – never remaining the same for even two seconds. The word *place* also diminishes the notion of living things being included in favour of a setting, a stage for things to happen, a backdrop for »someone else's performance«. Quite the

contrary is the case: what *place* refers to *only* consists of living beings, it is both action and setting, since a background as such does not exist.

»The ecological thought eats through the life – non-life distinction. We can abandon all variations of Romantic vitalism – that is, believing in a vital spark separate from the material organization of life forms. Material organization turns out to be sets of formal relationships, not squishy stuff.« (T. Morton)

*Situation*, includes space and time, action and stillness, and, most strikingly, ephemerality. So then social normalisation comes in, socially trained bodily functions. My eyes are trained to detect and lock in with another persons' eyes. My right hand is trained to reach towards a door knob or a pen. My ears are trained to pay attention to a car approaching from behind over the wind in the leaves of a tree behind me. My face is trained to smile at a familiar face (belonging to someone I know) that I spot in the street and to ignore everyone else that passes by.

**My »mody« (mind and body, Jeanine Durning) is trained not to lie down in the mud but on the wooden dancefloor, to kneel in the grass but not on asphalt, to scream in an open field but not in the metro, to lift my feet when approaching steps...**

All these adjustments of ignoring, removing things from my attention, and emphasizing, highlighting other things in order to bring my attention to them – all these are necessary tools to compose my own legible *situation* out of the high entropy of equally entangled things (=beings). I am trained for 32 and a half years now in how to do that. First through reflexes that I was born with. »React to this in that way, but not to that«, tells me my mody. Then through my own exploration of the beings around. I slowly learn to sort them out, bring my senses together (synchronize vision, touch, smell, taste and sound into a coherent enough thing-world that makes some decent sense to me. But does it make sense? Can it make sense?)

**How can I bring this automated world-making process (back; or for the first time?) into a somewhat conscious, aware or at least alert way of being (=moving) in the world? I move therefore I am. (Being is living is moving). What can I *not* let go of? This is what I am addressing in my physical exploration. Being (=moving) in different situations. I put myself in situations that are commonly referred to as**

**»public space« and »nature«, as well as some other situations that are more shielded from a human outside eye.**

What is it to be present?

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*»What is it to be present?«*

I often encounter the wish to extend the present by wanting to take photos, projecting the present as a future past into the future. At the same time, the present is disrupted by the action of photo taking, it is shortened by the attempt to postpone the present into the photo, the future. I am actually deceiving myself from the present, as a photo can only represent the past.

**Being my environment means thus being with everything and all.**

It includes, of course, being with friends and partners. I have observed myself the tendency to »sponge up« the characteristics of my surroundings, e.g. life partners. My way to be in the world is to build – and cut – entanglements with (the characteristics of) others. It has to do with the kind of »radical passivity« (Timothy Morton) that is active only in the absorbing of the world, an attending of what is already there, »the sheer coexistence«. If we look at the language of Alva Noë, perception is everything else but passive. Perception doesn't happen in the brain but in the whole body that undergoes a close »give-and-take« relationship with the rest of the world.

*»What perception is, however, is not a process in the brain, but a kind of skilful activity on the part of the animal as a whole.«<sup>11</sup> (Alva Noë)*

For Noë, capacities for perception, action and thought are impossible to disassociate. We are even using the world around as a kind of hard disk to store cognitive data and memories that are not presently needed:

*»Off-loading internal processing onto the world simplifies our cognitive lives [...] and makes evolutionary sense.«*

But in the end both Morton and Noë, and now also me are saying, again: We are the world! I am not only »me, myself and I«, but through interconnections everything else as well, I am the *other*, the *strange stranger* (Morton).

**When I wrote in my abstract that »I want to train the permeability of losing and finding my center in an articulated collective process« I didn't yet see the magnitude of that proposition. That I would find a movement practice that does exactly that, the »collective« being the world of all beings around me.**

What if my relationship to space was being-doing the space itself? What if absorbing the other is the only way to be and the acknowledgement of it a way that brings me closer to myself? What if I can shape who I am and who I want to be through the other?

*Through active-passively shaping my world as positioned affairs in time, my being (in) the world becomes radically inclusive of the other, it becomes radically queer like Barad's quantum entanglements.*

**My movement practice is set out to make myself melt with the other. To become one knot in the mesh of all beings. I am curious to continue observing what kind of physicalness is induced in myself over time. After one month of daily situative moving-perceiving I am already experiencing a hint of another, entangled consciousness seeping into my everyday life. More of that! – hopefully, sooner than later.**

#### **Works Cited**

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<sup>1</sup> Alva Noë: Action in perception. The MIT Press, 2004. p.5

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger: Bauen Wohnen Denken. Lecture. From Poetry, Language, Thought, translated by Albert Hofstadter, Harper Colophon Books, New York, 1971.

<sup>3</sup> M. Heidegger

<sup>4</sup> A. Noë, p.50

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Morton: The Ecological Thought. Harvard University Press. 2010.

<sup>6</sup> T. Morton, p. 18

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze. Difference and Repetition. 1968. In English: The Athlone Press. 1994

<sup>8</sup> T. Morton, p. 49

<sup>9</sup> T. Morton, p. 44

<sup>10</sup> Coming back to a concept from biology that I have referred to already in my written response for the HZT application. H. R. Maturana, F. J. Varela: Tree of Knowledge: Biological Roots of Human Understanding. Shambhala, 1987

<sup>11</sup> Alva Noë, p.2