

At the Intersection of Performing Arts and Public Space

# Rituals for the City and its Fringes









# And if We Had to Invent an Artistic Ritual for the City, What Would it Be?

It's by letting ourselves be touched by this question in mind that we navigated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of Feral festival, that took place in Brussels from 10 to 14 September 2024.

For five days, artists, researchers, activists, participants, and listeners gathered for this annual programme of artistic interventions and encounters around performing art in the city and its fringes. Starting with a two-day workshop led by the Laboratory of Insurrectional Imagination, the festival continued with three days of artistic encounters, which took us from La Bellone to La Fonderie<sup>1</sup>, via the Brussels Canal.

Through this journey, we explored artists' motivations for creating rituals

and experimenting with them within the social fabric.

We made the presumption that these ritual practices were the symptom of a deficiency, a crisis in our relationship to the world, to our territories, to living things, to human beings, to the invisible. We considered the power relations whereby our patriarchal and colonial heritages continue to prevent access to public space, and we raised the question of responsibility for the failure to respect the right to the city and basic needs. We met artists who open up time-spaces in which the present is modified, artists who create situations where the "what ifs" can become reality because their effects take shape in the public sphere.

Once the festival concluded, it was beneficial to keep track of the embodied words and the context in which the artists had been able to make peer-to-peer exchanges and create meaningful alliances.

**Feral Magazine** wishes to shake up the notion of public space through artistic practices in tune with today's political and social emergencies. It collects and extends the reflections exchanged during **Feral festival**, which brings together artists and thinkers, activists and experimenters, around a common theme. From the relationship between urban and rural (2022) to the solidarity of bodies of water (2023), it's the **ritual** that brought us together in this latest issue. Self-published and free of charge, the entire magazine is available online on **Cifasothèque**, Cifas' artistic resources platform. Feral magazine represents the year's harvest and is an incentive for taking offshoots, an annual ritual of sharing and contamination.



1. La Fonderie is an emblematic site, bearing witness to the industrial past of the municipality of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean. The association, founded in 1983, works to bring to light this heritage: [lafonderie.be](http://lafonderie.be).

2. Stacy Makishi, in "Walking and Talking Each Other Home", p. 11.

The following articles report on and condense the various speeches shared during the festival. These dialogues are complemented by Murielle Lô's illustrations, produced in part as a reportage, drawn during the three public days of Feral.

In addition to this are unpublished contributions, either commissioned or subsequently collected. This is also the case with the drawings, which capture features sketched in the effervescence of the present moment. New compositions appear, reflecting reminiscences or the charge of ritual objects that accompanied the festival's interventions.

Polyphonic and moving to the rhythm of different temporalities, this issue of Feral Magazine is divided into four chapters.

Believing that "rituals invite the denied, forgotten, and buried parts of our souls to appear"<sup>2</sup>, we question the passage from intimacy to public space (*Rites of the Intimate*).

The focus then shifts to a cyclical, collective ritual ceremony, Carnival, to look at who has the right to change traditions and folklore ("*Carnival is a celebration that the people give to themselves*").

We observe how rituals, by replaying a permanent tension between the imaginary and the real, testify to a need to do things together and to rediscover a capacity to act (*The Ritual, a Theatre of Magic?*).

As tools for action, rituals bring collective intelligence to rethink our ways of welcoming and reenvision our social justice formats (*Welcoming Gestures, Hospitality Rituals*).

As a counterpoint, philosopher Mohamed Amer Meziane sheds light on the fact that artists are

reappropriating rituals, the fruit of a disenchantment with the world (see *Notes on the Rites of Art*).

In the middle of the publication, a narrative map unfolds, tracing the route of the (anti)speculative tour around Brussels canal zone on Feral's last day. It serves as an invitation to experiment with what an artistic ritual for the city might look like.

Welcome to Feral Magazine n°3!

Emmanuelle Nizou, with Cifas team

This **third issue** was created by Emmanuelle Nizou (editor-in-chief), Murielle Lô (illustrations) and Lucie Caouder (graphics), under the editorial coordination of Cifas.

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# Rites of the Intimate

“My mother, she changes the *Mole* recipe when All Souls’ Day approaches.

- What changes?
- She makes it more bitter. Very bitter, yes.
- Do the dead prefer bitterness?
- No, that’s for us. To relive our pain.”

Excerpt from the logbook of Élie Guillou & Maryne Lanaro

“From the cradle to the grave”, traditional rites play a fundamental role in a life that progresses through oscillations and stages. Birth, engagement, marriage, funerals... These ceremonies accompany changes in place, status, social situation, and age. Initiation rites can mark the integration into a community, while rites of passage can ease the perception of our mortal condition. With secularisation and capitalist materialism, these rituals have the tendency to disappear from our Western culture, impoverished or appropriated by consumer society.

There is a need for meaningful ritual practices to provide a foundation for our psychological, social, and existential processes. “Rituals create a safe framework within which it is acceptable to see, feel, and hear profound and unexpressed emotions. As a result, the inner experience receives the recognition it craves, freeing up space for healing, transformation and forgiveness, all of which contribute greatly to restoring our inner compass.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Arnold Van Gennep, *Le Folklore français Vol. 1. Du berceau à la tombe, Cycles de Carnaval, Carême de Pâques*, Laffont, 1998.

2. Barbara Raes, “The Strength of Rituals in Farewells”. *Beyond the Spoken* is a workspace around unacknowledged loss and tailor-made farewell rituals.



Today we are witnessing a shift in the role of the artist in society, attempting to respond to this gap. Creating or participating in alternative rituals that are less dry and standardised is an invitation to reclaim one's own agency. This first chapter, devoted to "rites of the intimate", opens the magazine with artistic approaches that are woven into the fabric of social life. By enriching ritual practices, these artistic strategies accompany transitions around events that are less visible or recognised by our societies shaped by patriarchal and colonial heritage, and individually and collectively reinvent the place of death.

# Walking and Talking Each Other Home

Born in Hawaii and based in London, Stacy Makishi is a performance artist with over 40 years experience. Her work combines autobiographical storytelling, live art, theatre, comedy, film, and visual art. During Feral festival, she tells a personal story, punctuated by rituals from her recent show *The Ritual*. She also shares some recipes for creating her rituals, which she believes serve to invite the manifestation of our whole being: rituals are both “direct knowledge of the deep self and the ultimate recognition that we know nothing at all.”

“Aloha everybody!

I’m Stacy Makishi. I don’t know why my dad named me Stacy... because he never called me Stacy. He called me ‘Tracy’. But I guess, ‘Stacy’ or ‘Tracy’, it’s *almost* the same, right?

My dad’s love for me was an almost kind of love. He left us when I was 9 months old. And my mom stayed alone with 3 kids. We had no house, no money, no birthday cards. No wait, I did get one card once, it read: ‘Happy Birthday Tracy’.

I spent my whole life trying to find a way to hold my father’s attention. And over the years... I did it! ... I did! By writing him letters. Yeah... he loved my letters... he *lived* for my letters. So, do you know what I did? I stopped writing. Yeah. I withheld. For over 15 years.

I can see him now going to check the mail. When he gets to the mailbox, he stands there and hopes: ‘Will I get a letter today?’... and as his hand pulls the handle towards his heart, for this one moment in time, I finally hold

my father’s full attention. The longer I withhold, the greater his pain... I withhold my love. Because withholding is the only way I know how to hold him.

But then he died. And what I’m left holding is regret.

I would never want that for you.

So, the first ritual that I’d like to offer you, is my own version of a Hawaiian ritual called *Ho’oponopono*.

To do it, you’ll need a paper and pen.

Here’s a question for you: if the world were to end today, what would you regret not saying and to whom?

On one side of the paper, write the initials of the person.

This person could be dead or alive. It can even be to yourself.

On the other side of the paper, you might want to use one of these prompts:

*I’m sorry. I forgive you. Thank you.  
I love you.*



My letter might go something like this:

*Dear Dad,  
I'm sorry for withholding my love,  
I love you,  
Tracy.*



My father died ten years ago.

After he died, my soul wasn't interested in having my grief repressed, shamed or silenced. It wasn't interested in being distracted or numbed either.

My soul wanted its grief to be expressed. But for this expression to happen, I needed a strong, loving and flexible container. Something capable of holding the intensity of emotions: the wild, feral, animal...that is grief.

Rituals invite the denied, forgotten, buried parts of our souls to show up. They make the invisible, visible. This is why we fear them so much. On some gut level, we KNOW the power of a ritual: we recognize its power to disrupt our ordered and controlled lives.

I was born in Hawaii and raised in two indigenous cultures: Hawaiian and Okinawan culture. These cultures believe that we each have a soul. When our soul has been injured, we lose our capacity to feel. The soul *feels* its way home.

Since I was a small kid, whenever my soul felt hurt, I found my way home by 'making': making drawings, or stories... but my favourite thing to make were rituals.

Rituals live beyond words, ritual is the original performance art. It's a form of direct knowing, a 'knowing' from deep within the bones... But ritual also lives in the vast 'unknowing', as it is itself... a Mystery.

Ritual has a soulful quality, a 'pitch', tone, or vibration that helps us to connect with the sacred. We yearn for the sacred when we're in grief, or wrestling with the Unknown, or staring down the dark road of Uncertainty... We call upon the 'mysterious', upon nature, our ancestors, the invisible, light or love to help us do the work we cannot do alone.

In the ritual space, something alive in us shimmers, quickens, and aligns itself with a larger, more 'alive' element. We're finally released from the rules and restrictions of our 'culture': not showing our emotions in public, not bothering others with our problems, keeping our pain self-contained. Rituals invite our whole selves to show up. The safer the space, the more of ourselves we feel safe to be released. This allows us to enter into a fuller expression of who we really are. This is both freeing and terrifying! We become vivid, bold, loud, wild, raw, exposed in ritual space. This is exactly what we FEAR and what we need."

Alphonse Eklou  
Uwantege  
(BE)

# How I Talk to my Dead

A queer Sagittarius born in Minsk to a Rwandan and Togolese family, Alphonse Eklou Uwantege is a model, performer, and stage director. Their body is their tool, writing is their weapon of resurrection, and performance is a political urgency. “How do you bury someone when there is no body?” is the question they seek to answer through *restes* [remains], a ritual tribute to their uncle Alphonse Kanimba, who died during the Tutsi genocide. Uwantege’s talk at Feral sheds light on their approach: to act as a memorial and offer symbolic reparation when colonial history divides and silences the traumas it has caused.

“My name is Alphonse, and I’m 27 years old. I’m in the process of creating a solo piece, *restes*, about transgenerational trauma, invisible memories and colonial legacies: a ritual paying tribute to my uncle, Alphonse Kanimba, murdered in 1994 during the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda. When my mother learns of his death in ‘94, she decides to name her first child Alphonse. I inherited the first name of a person who was murdered.

Until my teens, I was subject to uncontrolled panic attacks. I understood why during a trip to Togo, where rituals and animism are very present. We took part in a ceremony

during which I was told that someone is speaking through me: my uncle’s wandering soul is supposedly asking to be buried because his body was never found. Because of my Catholic upbringing, I didn’t want to believe it. It scared me, and I looked at life and death from a Western perspective. When we return to Belgium, I feel that something has changed, but I am not ready for it.

In 2017, I go to Rwanda by myself to visit my mother’s family. I visit the Tutsi genocide memorial and cry for three hours. I finally know the real version of history and feel completely betrayed. Ever since I was a young child, I felt Belgian, more than Togolese or Rwandan. When I learn about Belgium’s involvement in this genocide, in the death of my uncle and in my traumas, I no longer know who I am. I am angry at this country and I feel that justice must be done.

I keep all this inside me. When I get back, I decide to share my uncle’s story, as well as mine and others like ours. I then start drama school, and each exercise becomes an

opportunity to address these subjects. There, I write an autofictional play, *Selles qui restent* [Feces that remain], featuring three women – each transpositions of my murdered uncle, my mother and myself – in five different parts of the world: Togo, Minsk, Kigali, Brussels and the after-life. In mourning, they attempt to find the perfect wave to bury one of them, and wish for life for the two others. I invite my mother to come and see the play, and, for the first time, we have a discussion about the genocide.

At 25, I go back to Rwanda for three months, with the clearer objective of documenting my relationship with this country and my origins. I meet people from my generation, born after the genocide, who are also looking for answers to questions that aren't addressed, as there isn't room to ask them. And these answers aren't going to come from our parents still busy trying to digest and understand. I am going to have to carry this story with my own words and body.

So, I start creating *restes* and involve myself in activist circles that are working on creating non-mixed spaces with people who have similar stories to mine. I'm trying to find a way to invite people to collectively pay attention to this part of my story. So I develop a ritual centred around coffee grounds and a dance focused on the coccyx, which is the area of the body we store trauma in. This space of ritual is far from blank, as we are all inheritors of a colonial history. I bring together part of the audience: people whose ancestors lived subjugated by colonialism, those who maybe carry a name, trauma, memories of genocide, all the things passed on to us against our will. I invite them to surrender what they need to let go of by writing

it down. This ritual is intended as a symbolic act of reparation. History has divided us and continues to do so, even though I want to believe that one day we'll be able to look in the same direction, together. In order to do that, we need to locate our actions, words, and our guilt. The ritual paves the way for me to reappropriate the cultures that colonisation, migration and evangelisation prevented being passed down to me. Through it, I connect with my uncle and reflect on my colonised history, so that we can collectively form remembrance. The coffee grounds represent the thousand hills of my country, where Alphonse's body rests.

*"The Genocide against the Tutsi isn't told the same way here as over there"*



→ [@alphonseeklouuwanteg](#)



# The Making of Funeral Rituals

Élie Guillou is a writer, musician, and member of the Rennes Funeral Cooperative: a cooperative created in 2019 by Isabelle Georges and Grégory Nieuviart to give power back to the deceased's relatives at the time of death. Guillou reports on how this unique funeral service is taking back control of the funeral ritual, enriched by the individual stories of the deceased and the bereaved. The creation of these customised secular funeral rituals has given rise to unprecedented forms; a "toolbox" filled by artists that stretches imaginations and sensibilities.

"Hello, I'm an artist, writer and musician, but I'm speaking today as an officiant at the Coopérative funéraire de Rennes. Unlike other areas of society, which previously became personalised and are now attempting to reintegrate into the collective, the funeral ritual follows the opposite trend by becoming more individualised. The principle behind this unique funeral service is to return power to the families in the devising of the ritual. This principle guides the work of Isabelle Georges and Grégory Nieuviart, who have developed it through their creativity and who officiate at most of the ceremonies. They frequently use this metaphor: when a family arrives at the cooperative after losing someone, they feel like they're in front of a very dense, extremely dark forest. In a traditional funeral home, there are two straight, cemented roads: here, burial; there, cremation. By listening to the stories of the families and trying to give them a unique form, they realised there was a clearing here, a stream there, a small bridge over there, a rocky peak here,

and countless ways of crossing this forest. The officiant's role is to enable the community surrounding the deceased to find their own way.

A so-called secular, civil or non-religious funeral ritual is not codified by texts, the gathered community isn't synchronised by a post-mortem narrative: nothingness, salvation, metamorphosis... Its function is not to accompany the deceased to a certain place or a state; its form turns towards the living. It's a rite of passage, marking an irreversible change: a community must part from the body of someone whose presence constituted them. This has an impact on the structure of the ceremony. What we create as officiants are the passages between the thresholds, like doorways to be crossed, allowing families to move to the other side. In the way we, as a secular French community, have gotten used to creating this ritual, there are two key moments that help us accept this moment of breaking away.

First, the tribute, which can take the form of stories, music or gestures.



*"The funeral ritual: passage & ritual of separation, allowing families to find their own way forward."*

Its purpose is to create a symbolic entity with which to relate once the body has gone. The link must be transformed in order to begin relating to the deceased in a different way. Then, there is a kind of zooming out that might correspond to recollection: it's a matter of placing the painful experience in a broader context. It's a form of meditation that can be observed in silence, in the company of a song, a gesture, a poem or a prayer. It allows some kind of exhalation, whether socially, historically, symbolically, cosmically or religiously, before diving into separation.

Now let's turn to the form. It's up to the family to decide how to shape the ceremony. It seems to me that this is the point where my practices as both an artist and funeral officiant converge: starting with a story, an intuition, and finding the right form. The form in question summons up a life, revealing certain aspects of it. Our role is to expand the possibilities and inspire different ways of holding a ceremony, allowing the families to make it their own and come up with a

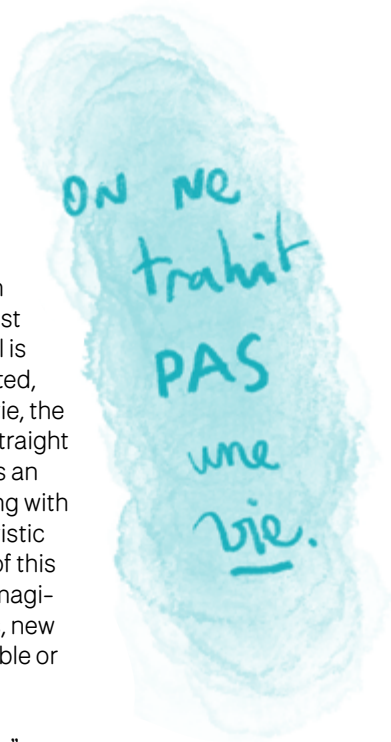
personalised proposal. It's essential to sense where this community needs or wishes to be engaged. Sometimes thirty people are fully involved, handling everything, upholstering the coffin, taking it home, fetching objects, singing... Other times, there is only one brave person. Each time, potential strengths must be identified and involved. It's not a question of aesthetics, it's a question of meaning. For some, it may mean collecting pebbles on the beach at Sainte-Anne-la-Palud; for others, toasting in the funeral parlour with a bottle of red wine. The task is to remain faithful to the way of life of the deceased and, at times, to relieve the family from the pressure of 'holding a ceremony': the form can be enriched or, on the contrary, reduced.

What matters is what will be created between the first meeting and the ritual: choosing the location, deciding who will speak, particularly in crematoria where time is very limited. Leaving the speeches to family members alone may fulfil a need, but it can also potentially diminish the ritual.

She was a mother, a wife, but she was also an activist, a basketball partner, a team-mate, etc. She belonged to all these tribes, and each one has a story to tell. Together, they form this symbolic body. When people discover these other facets, they leave with a deeper and more textured perspective to extend the connection with the deceased. We must ask ourselves: did we reduce or extend the person's life? It seems to me these responsibilities are similar to those involved in creating a work of art. Have we betrayed our initial impression? Has the need that drove us to create shifted?

I'll end by questioning this intersection of art, artists and funeral rituals. When an artist intervenes as such in the ceremony – I'm part of a collective of musicians who sing at ceremonies – it's very powerful. Inviting someone from outside who isn't directly involved in the separation breathes a different energy into the ceremony. It's as if the artist brings the whole community in tune with his or her breath in just three minutes. Finally, the ritual is highly constrained: time is limited, you can't upset uncle and auntie, the cousin has to catch his plane straight afterwards, it costs money... It's an old-fashioned ritual progressing with small steps. Each time an artistic proposal freely takes hold of this ritual and stretches our imaginations and sensibilities, new forms become acceptable or conceivable.

Thank you very much."



*"You don't betray a life."*

→ [lacoopfunerairederennes.fr](http://lacoopfunerairederennes.fr)  
→ [elieguillou.squarespace.com](http://elieguillou.squarespace.com)

Maryne Lanaro  
(FR)

# Practice as a Belief of Intention







Maryne Lanaro is a space dramaturg, director and performer. She has collaborated with the Rennes Funeral Cooperative as a ceremony officiant. With the Grand Dehors collective, she presents works in public space. Lanaro's research focuses on secular funeral rituals and narratives surrounding the end of life, both intimate and environmental. She spent a month in Mexico with Élie Guillou (mainly in the state of Oaxaca) during *Día de los Muertos*, to fuel the creation of her commemorative show *Autel de Ville* [City Altar]. We spoke with Lanaro on her return, to gather the fruits of her experience as an artist-researcher, officiant, and mourner.

**EMMANUELLE NIZOU:**  
**"Your research began with the observation that France is a thanatophobic country, and with your desire to encounter collective practices that give death a place in the city. What did you take with you when you headed for a society like Mexico that embraces thanatophilia?"**

**MARYNE LANARO:**  
Two weeks before we left, Élie had an epiphany and sent me a message: 'Maryne, we need to find a way, starting with our own experience of death, so let's take our dead along with us.' We sounded-out the bereaved people we had previously accompanied to funeral ceremonies, and officiants and friends who didn't know what to do with the presence of the dead – why not find a place for them on this journey? In our metaphorical suitcases we would take the dead who had kindly been entrusted to us and set up an altar for them. We would then see what happens, even if it's disturbing.

This way of embarking on the adventure enabled us to establish a relationship whose quality benefited both parties involved – as in Édouard Glissant's definition of Relation as 'where I can change through exchanging with the Other, without losing or distorting myself.' We had this link between mourners from France and Mexico, and were already in the experience.

**EN: How did you go about collecting the practices and know-how surrounding death?**

**ML:** Because the dead need objects, music and food, we spoke to mourners in France beforehand to find out what they liked, what made sense, what intention they had, which words should be spoken... Once we were in Mexico, we explained our approach to each person we met in search of such objects, which enabled us to question the diversity of practices concerning the offerings that accompany the altar. 'You can't put a photo of a living person on the



altar.' 'For her he's gone, but he's not dead.' 'No, that's bad luck.' This allowed us to enter into conversations and create a meeting of practices that relaxed the rules. Prior to that, we had met an Afro-Mexican hairdresser working on decolonisation in Oaxaca, with whom we had a huge discussion about cultural appropriation. Oaxaca is a place of mass tourism around the festival of the dead. Sixteen ethnic groups live side by side and 80% of the population worships at the altar, whatever the cult. The syncretism was so strong that ours was just another syncretism.

**EN: While you were busy preparing your altar, in the West we were celebrating our own dead on what Christians call All Saints' Day. How is it that in Oaxaca (or more broadly, Mexico), the intimate becomes connected to a collective and public space-time?**

**ML:** The spaces of intimacy are the family homes: each family has its own altar. Setting it up is a gesture that stretches the space of sharing and bonding: you have to make *mole de pollo* [a chicken dish] for the grandmother and put the bread for the dead on the altar, so you go to the market to buy the ingredients. People also place locally crafted items on the altar. In each village we came across a factory that's cared for by the whole community. Everything converges on this altar and a space of solidarity is woven into a rhizome. I realised that nothing was happening in France for all the people I was in contact with. All Saints' Day is for Catholics, and Halloween is for children. Atheists don't go to the cemetery to place

chrysanthemums. In France there's no place for public commemoration and solidarity.

**EN: On *Día de los Muertos*, how are the public spaces showing signs of connection with death? I'm thinking, for example, of the special ribbons attached to door frames.**

**ML:** The black ribbon you see above the doors of houses is put up on the days following the death of someone in the household. Some people leave it up until it falls off by itself; others remove it when they feel they need to move on. I saw these ribbons as a very evocative sign of the 'community of care', which must watch over the living who experience loss and disappearance. During the celebration of *Día de los Muertos*, there's an enormous porosity between grief, ritual, and festivity. Whereas in France, in both public and private spheres, there's a real disassociation between the space of grief, intimate space, and public space. Solidarity is very present in family homes, but also on a city scale. In the funeral spaces, the *velatorios*, there's an open-access kitchen where families can come and cook, and a patio to accommodate people and an orchestra. The celebration room forms part of the place of commemoration. Funerals are paid for by a collective tontine, it's not just the family that has to cover the cost. Food is always prepared and brought in by everyone.

**EN: During your stay in Mexico, you collected offerings for your altar, but you also interviewed many people about their**



### relationship with death...

**ML:** The support we received from the Institut Français gave us the opportunity to talk to some quality 'fixers', such as the director of the Museum of Popular Art. We also made contact with two Zapotec artisans who are very well-known in Mexico – they produce *alebrijes*, the little animal figurines that serve as our protective angels, which have become a very strong Mexican trademark. We also met an artist who makes plays about disappearance... We asked all these people the same questions: 'What do you do on the Day of the Dead? Do you have an altar at home? How do you dress it? Do you believe in it?' We found out from several generations their fondness for the belief for 24 hours on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November the dead return. Then there were the people we met looking for items for the altar. This was really a way for us to collect things off the pavement, to avoid seeing the city from above and understand its flow from the inside.

### EN: Where was your altar, did you find somewhere for it to be?

**ML:** We had nine days to install the altar before the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. It couldn't be in a hotel, it had to be in a house. We found a place with a couple of Mexican-Belgian musicians in the village of Santo Domingo, north of Oaxaca. Other people staying in the house added their dead. In the end, there were over a hundred of them. The altar became much bigger than we had imagined. We spent the whole day tending to it: placing the candles, the bread for the dead, changing the water... all in a slightly

Christmassy atmosphere. There was dancing and laughter, and some of us added flowers... The importance of the dead in Mexico is more an excuse for the living to meet up.

### EN: Did you also take part in a *muertead* on the Day of the Dead?

**ML:** Yes. In Santo Domingo, there's a rather special festival for the dead, the *muertead*, which is mostly practised in the villages around Oaxaca. It's a procession that moves through the whole village from 7pm to 6am, passing by some thirty houses, during which time the dead person 'comes back to life' with the help of archetypal figures such as the doctor, the spiritualist, the priest, the deacon, and the person in charge of social missions in the village. There's a lot of shouting, a lot of mezcal, and a fire that needs to be stoked. Each time the procession stops at a house a play is performed, telling the story of the person who lives there, embodied by the same seven figures. La *banda*, the orchestra, plays a central role in keeping the procession going. When we arrive at the cemetery, the procession ends with a flourish – each character recounts a tale about his or her deceased loved one, and then everyone has lunch on the graves.

### EN: You didn't return to your altar?

**ML:** I did. With Élie. We were torn between wanting to go back, since it's the 24 hour period when the dead are there, and wanting to hold this celebration that is so powerful. We abandoned the procession in



the morning and returned to the cemetery at 7am to witness the departure of the dead. I had to do something for Vadim, a child I'd buried at my first funeral ceremony. His father had entrusted his son to me to take to Mexico. There I played his favourite music, the same music I played for his funeral, and I cried a lot. Élie said to me: 'It's crazy that we don't have the space to mourn the loss we experience ourselves, as funeral officiants.' In fact, dealing with my own bereavement was truly a reconciliation.

**EN: Where has this journey moved you the most?**

**ML:** At the beginning, I envied people who prayed, and I regretted not having faith. As a funeral worker, I came back having calmed my practice through gesture. Making bread for the dead means making bread. I remember asking someone busy at the oven: 'Do you have the same beliefs as your father?' He said, 'No, but I have to believe in something if I'm not going to sleep for eight days and make bread.' As a bereaved person, I've found some very strong paths of consolation. Élie and I called it 'synchronicity', the ability to perceive things that happen without necessarily attributing a cultural meaning to them. It's the attention you pay to the gesture that makes you perceive or draw your attention to another way of seeing events happen. It creates other perspectives. There were some completely crazy phenomena. The same morning, the framed photo of Élie's grandfather, who was a sailor, fell into the water on the

altars in Mexico and France. The Mexicans said to us: 'Yes, these are signs, they're here, they're coming.' There were so many synchronicities that we felt a connection with the dead. There's no such thing as belief, just 'pareidolia': it is because I feel connected to something and take the time to observe it that I recognise myself in it, like in the clouds. It's shifted my way of being alive, of being human, of being with others, as a mourner, a ceremony officiant, and an artist who puts on shows about death. I've brought back my own family's dead and I've spoken to them about deeper issues. Now I'm no longer afraid of the practice. Practice as a belief of intention."

Mohamed Amer  
Meziane (FR/US)

**Counterpoint: the Fruits of the World's  
Disenchantment**

# Notes on the Rites of Art

"The imaginary is a  
dimension of the real."



What motivates artists to practise rituals? Does this go hand in hand with a growing atheism? Is it the result of the secularisation of society as a whole since modern times? Does it reflect the extent of a conceptual void and a disenchantment with the world? In an attempt to answer these questions and understand the current changes in the arts in the context of broader cosmopolitan and historical upheavals, we turned to philosopher Mohamed Amer Meziane, author of *The States of the Earth. An Ecological and Racial History of Secularisation* and *At the Edge of the Worlds. Towards a Metaphysical Anthropology*. We asked him about the relationship our Western societies have with the invisible, and the resources available to artists to engage in dialogue with the spectrum of non-humans, beyond the visible.



1. Exote refers to the capacity of “assimilating” and understanding another culture than his. As such, it’s distinct from if not opposed to exoticism.

**§ 1: Where does this faith in art come from?** This thing called “Art” today is the byproduct of a profound upheaval in the relationship between politics and spirituality in the West, of what is called, not without giving in to a certain convention, “disenchantment”. The constitution of “Aesthetics” since the 18<sup>th</sup> century refers to the idea of the autonomy of art regarding religious dogma or morality, both defined as sources of heteronomy hindering the freedom of the artist elevated to the status of prophet. “Religion” then designates the very type of heteronomy: from the moral constraint exercised by institutions against the freedom of “artists”, whether it be the State or the Church. Since it died in the form of religion, as a tangible expression of the absolute, it now exists in an autonomous form, as pure “art”, and it is this very status that kills it, so to speak. Art dies of being art alone. In the meantime, in synchrony, we begin to magnify genius, to institute the myth of the creator inhabited by a mysterious force of nature, escaping the rules of know-how and therefore of craftsmanship. Think of the well-known story according to which the distancing of “religion” presupposes a transfer of religious functions to things that are not. Politics, science, art are “sacralised”. Geniuses have eternal bodies that are sanctified in Pantheons as demigods. “Industry is worship,” as is art. Aesthetic creation and enjoyment demand singular and “absolute” rights. Manifestos are published. Art becomes doctrine, a secular profession of faith.

**§ 2: The broken mirror.** In the absence of genius: fragments remain of the legacies in which we would like to find ourselves. Thousands of beings look at themselves in a broken mirror, searching for their lost reflection. There are only shattered pieces of oneself. One guesses at oneself. Faceless. The experience of the broken mirror is the matrix of another creation. A thousand leagues away from the myth of the creation *ex nihilo* of an artist reproducing the myth of the God-Man with the laughable narrowness of the ego elevating art to an absolute: abolishing this myth of secularization in the arts. Inhabiting these fragments of heritage, like ancestral futurism disseminated throughout the era. Inhabiting the gaps, the loss, making one’s home out of what is no longer there. A path strewn with obstacles.

**§ 3: Ritual and the “exote”.<sup>1</sup>** So far, we have only fantasized about “the sacred” kept at a distance. We are left with only a few words and a set of idealized images about this absence we do not know much about. “Moderns” imitate an image of ritual from travelogues and claim to “invent” a rite. Exoticism without the exote. Because the exote has always held the sacred of the Moderns’ exoticism in holy horror. The sacred of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* is private property. Not all recourse to ritual in art necessarily falls outside the framework of imperial and capitalist modernity. The emergence of nationalism has given rise, even within religious traditions, to a kind of formalism of practices that appeared with modernity. Belief is of little importance so long as the rituals are performed. The formalized ritual then becomes

appropriable and is staged as a spectacle maintained in its *status quo*.

**§ 4: Trans-aesthetic, the ritual inhabits a sensory realm that it immediately pushes to its limit.**

We, "artists" or "inhabitants of the stage," are by no means the first to have understood that rhythm makes it possible to generate a disposition in oneself. "Belief systems" exist in the mind of those who try to decipher or study them. Practices are techniques of the soul. Singing, dancing, and individual or collective reading allow us to create ways of being, feeling, and acting, ways of seeing and hearing, and of touching through the senses of the mind. The techniques of the soul provide access to thresholds of reality dismissed as "non-existent" by those who have neither the practice nor the vision of "the invisible".

**§ 5: Without the possibility of a reality of the spirits, there is no animist experience.** And I am not saying there should be one! Becoming closer to nature no longer makes sense if what we call "nature" is inhabited by a soul that is humanity. In the absence of the great Whole that is nature, not all human beings are animals like any others: western naturalism that nevertheless populates the corridors of "ecology". What we call "nature" refers to multiple entities that are both visible and invisible, things that have a spiritual aspect. It is on this condition that we can enter in a social relationship with them. This invisible part is often erased from exhibitions, shows, speeches, etc. We have extracted what we wanted to see from these traditions that we pretend to admire and appropriate.

**§ 6: Barzakh<sup>2</sup>, another scene in the debate.**

More than a "world" between worlds, an interval that separates and unifies two things: existence and non-existence, presence and absence, the living and the dead. *Barzakh* is the place where the dead await judgment, and which also makes them a kind of living being. And it is precisely because they wait in this interlude that they can haunt the living through some of their dreams. These are dream-visions, visions in the dream. The *barzakh* intervenes as the locus of these dreams that don't just happen in your head but come to you from elsewhere. It is not *only* your body that speaks. It is your body as the power of other wor(l)ds.

**§ 7: The term "imagination" refers to a faculty of the mind: the way in which the mind forges real or illusory images.** We have lost access to the idea that "imagination" is something that comes to us, to the imaginal. Imaginative power is the ability to make something right, to welcome into ourselves something that must be imagined through us. The imaginary is a dimension of reality. A form of our mind that is also a form of the real, the imaginary is a way of conceiving and experiencing a reality that we miss.



*"What we called Art in the past was religion or rite."*

**§ 8: What is most bodily in the body is perhaps a better mode of access to what exceeds the visible than consciousness is.** Hence, the "spiritual" is always deceptive because there is no "view of the spirit" that is not deeply corporeal. What escapes us at the heart of bodies is also what gives us access to this "imaginary reality".

**§ 9: The souls have been removed from our explanation of nature or physical phenomena through idealism.** The Cartesian fiction of a disembodied spirit has been established to reduce the physical to the physical or the body to the body. The dualism of mind and body was deployed by Descartes to analyse bodies mechanically: "nature is a set of laws; it functions like a machine". This dualism has therefore given rise to its own materialistic dissolution, often anti-Cartesian, through the assertion that the mind is nothing but matter, a computational machine, a computer. Spiritualism without a body, or materialism without a spirit, would be the greatest victory for the defenders of the separation of body and soul.

→ Listen to the "Interview around the invisible in the arts" (in French) with Mohamed Amer Meziane on the [Cifasothèque](#).

# "Carnival is a Celebration the People Throw for Themselves."<sup>1</sup>

"It's that moment which arises like a stimulating breeze at the end of winter, heralding the approach of spring. It's a transition into the new year – without any 'good resolutions' – which frees us from all our shackles, bad spirits and gloomy thoughts. It's a carnivaline rush<sup>2</sup>, a carnival fever rising within us, at the heart of our communities, ready to blossom and finally die in the burgeoning promises of the festivities to come. Joy!"

Les Reines Pédauques [The Queens Pedauque]<sup>3</sup>

A collective practice in public space, Carnival is a ritual ceremony that corresponds to the cycles of end-of-winter or pre-Lent, the beginning of spring and May. At Feral, we have turned to carnival practices that experiment with festive rituals of radical emancipation. We do this in order to understand how folk traditions are revisited through a decolonial, inclusive approach that denounces systemic domination. The following pages give voice to those who participate in this broader political consciousness. Active in anarchist and autonomous movements, in contestation of the patriarchal order, in feminist and queer movements, in neo-rural movements, in ZADs (Zones to Defend) or in cities, these voices raise a clamour of protest in the heart of our public sphere. To complement the round table discussion "Who can change Carnival?", we asked anthropologist and artist Anaïs Vaillant to enlighten us about these communities of experience that break free from convention.

1. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Roman Carnival", 1788; [Italian Journey](#), 1816.

2. Carnivaline: a Piscénois term (Pézanais), an imaginary hormone similar to serotonin. A neurotransmitter in the central nervous system, carnivaline plays an essential role in the individual's involvement in the carnival celebration: adrenaline,

sexual excitement, mood management, increased capacity for digestion and absorption of alcohol, disinhibition of emotions, desire for collective life and sharing, reduced need for sleep and increased physical endurance. (Les Reines Pédauques)

3. In: [Carnavale-toi! Petit guide d'émancipation féministe carnavalesque](#), Cambourakis, 2025.





Carnaval Sauvage  
[Wild Carnival]  
(BE), La Voix des  
Sans-Papiers (BE)  
[The Voice of the  
Undocumented],  
La Consœur  
des Connasses  
[The Sisterhood  
of Bitches] (BE) &  
Anaïs Vaillant (FR)

# Who Can Change Carnival?

We agree with Mohamed Amer Meziane that our link with tradition has been broken; or if we've preserved it, it has become fragmented. To embrace the disenchantment in which we find ourselves, we need to create from our "fragments of heritage", to "inhabit the gaps and the loss, to make what is no longer there one's habitat."<sup>1</sup>

Carnival then became our lens through which to question our relationship with tradition and legitimacy. Is it an act of reclaiming public space? How can we (re) claim its traditions while emancipating ourselves from a patriarchal and colonial regime? From the perspective of the right of access to the city, how can we "invent our own costumes, our own songs, inhabit our own territories?"<sup>2</sup>

This round table discussion highlights the counterculture represented by independent and 'wild' or autonomous carnivals, counter-carnivals that seek to escape the cultural and touristic industry. A moment of transgression of rules and hierarchies, Carnival pushes us to question the normativity of bodies in public space and to unfold what we want to create during this cycle of invention, construction, and destruction. What practices do we want to overturn and burn? What kind of collective organisation do we need in order to disseminate and perpetuate these experiences of struggle, endurance, and resistance?

1. See: Mohamed Amer Meziane, "Notes on the Rites of Art," pp.22-25.

2. Presentation of the Zinnodes by La Voix des Sans-Papiers: [zinneke.org/zinnode/zinnode-sans-papier-en-lutte](http://zinneke.org/zinnode/zinnode-sans-papier-en-lutte)

**EMMANUELLE NIZOU:** "Hello. Carnival is a ritual celebration that belongs to the people, the expression of collective creativity in public space. During this edition of Feral, we wanted to take a closer look at how this moment of public celebration has developed today, by giving a voice to the various artistic and activist collectives who invest it, between continuity and rupture. Let's start with introductions. During the carnival, you're wearing your costumes, and some of you are anonymous, hiding behind makeup or masks. Today, you've come as you are in your everyday lives, but you've brought objects that symbolize your respective struggles. Can you describe them?"

**CARNAVAL SAUVAGE:**

— There are six of us here today, but it's only a fragment of a much bigger party. I brought the remains of a costume that was designed during the first Carnival, "le Gille de Bruxelles", made of cans crushed in the street by cars. Charged with the city's telluric energies, they come alive during Carnival to the rhythm of this character, who is entirely covered with them.

— This is a hand that belonged to the king of the first Carnival Sauvage.

— This is an axe, a relic of the first Carnival Sauvage that is used to chase away anthropologists who claim that there is no such thing as cultural appropriation, only cultural appreciation.

— This is natural appropriation. I stole this idea from a fox. During the Rochefort carnival, I'd collide with cars and tumble to the ground.

A crowd would gather around me, blocking traffic. I found that very inspiring. Long live the foxes!

— This is a relic: the head of the first king of the carnival. One could say that a thousand faces can be seen in the cobblestone juice that contained it.

— This is an umbrella used by shepherds to guide the carnival. It was mainly used in 2023. I love how it mixes lace and hospital bands, a syncretism that symbolizes the DNA of Carnival Sauvage, the carnival of uprooted people from a multiple and heterogeneous Brussels.

*"We are the Wild Carnival. The carnival of counter-culture, of transgression, of rules and hierarchies."*



**EN: Taslim, Thierno, Alberto, you are members of La Voix des Sans Papiers de Bruxelles; you also present yourselves as "The Voice of The Invisibles". In June 2024, you took part in the Zinneke Parade, which isn't strictly a carnival, but rather an event organised in the city since 2000 by the cultural sector, and involving a large number of Brussels residents. Would you like to contextualize your fight and explain why you are taking part in this event?**

**LA VOIX DES SANS-PAPIERS:**

— La Voix des Sans Papiers is a self-managed collective created 10 years ago to fight for the regularisation of undocumented migrants. The Zinneke Parade takes place every two years in Brussels – each district of the city is represented by a parade group known as "zinnode". With the collectives of undocumented migrants, we occupy empty buildings that become like little villages. For us, all of them together form a district of Brussels. Taking part in the Zinneke Parade seemed like a way to reclaim public space: why not seize the opportunity to make our struggle visible and showcase our skills? And give ourselves spiritual and mental strength at the same time? We called our zinnode "The Resistance of the Invisibles" because the Belgian system makes us invisible, and we're going all out to claim and recover our rights.

— Our aim is to raise awareness among Belgians about the struggle of undocumented migrants, which many are unaware of. During our demonstrations, people often call us out because they don't understand what's happening. Others

are in "white innocence". At VSP, we encounter and suffer different forms of racism. If we take part in this festival, Feral, it's also to show that there are people living in very difficult conditions: since they don't have papers, they can't work. I've come here today with this djembe because it has played a very important role in the lives of numerous undocumented migrants in Brussels like me: it has been demonstrating with us since the beginning. It has lived through many things, including sad stories: people from the collective who have left Belgium to go to another country, others who were deported or have died. This djembe represents a true heritage for me.

— It's the first time we've participated in the Zinneke Parade. We are aware that the carnival is played to the rhythms of several instruments. The djembe only produces one but helped us draw people into the streets during the demonstrations. Our Zinneke Parade costumes symbolised our different cultures, and that is what gave this carnival its strength. Today, I'm wearing a yellow vest that I use for safety during demonstrations. It's part of the movement.

**EN: Carnaval is a chance for the invisibles to hack public space, to fight against the confiscation of the fundamental right to occupy and move freely through public space. It's also a favorable context to queer. The Louvière Carnival has been held since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and you, members of La Consœurrie des Connasses, have wanted to "invent your own Gillette<sup>3</sup>". What does its name refer to?**

**LA CONSŒURIE DES CONNASSES:**

— It refers to the Cosnards fraternity, founded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and eventually banned around the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Cosnard was the name given to the persons who played the cornet. Each year, the fraternity elected the cosnards' abbot, a title given to the one who had messed around the most that year and deserved to be celebrated during carnival time. We wanted to give a nod to that and celebrate our own little mischief.

**EN: You've come here with a banner representing your sisterhood, and you're holding carrots in your hands. Can you explain how your interventions in public space started and why you wanted to update this 'traditional' carnival?**

**LA CONSŒURIE DES CONNASSES:**

— It started by accident following a mediation action created by two Brussels artists with cabaret backgrounds, who wanted to organize workshops to form a trans-gay-lesbian alliance. Then we realised that with the mainstreaming of drag queens, we weren't moving away from the image sold on Amazon, made from 100% flammable wigs

and crappy boas. We wondered: 'as a matter of fact, where did the first transvestite appear?' 'Well, at the carnival!' Because up until that point, women didn't have access to public spaces; all the *dikke jeannettes* and *cannanneuses* are men dressed up as women. We came to the conclusion: 'Great, let's create workshops about carnival and go out into public space!' That's when troubles began.

— The carrot came about in reference to the fruit that the *Gille* throws. Everybody thinks he throws oranges, but that hasn't always been the case. He's originally a local popular character. One didn't buy oranges in the farthest reaches of Belgium; the vegetables available were parsnips, carrots, onions... The oranges correspond to a time when the carnival becomes richer and gentrifies. We use carrots because we're not wealthy. We're local and organic, we want to produce culture locally. Carrots can be eaten, they're rich in vitamin C and are also a defensive tool: you can throw them at the angry rightists from La Louvière.

— We created this banner in 2024. It's nice to have something that brings us together and represents us. It displays our beautiful seasonal vegetables, and because we're not bums, we wear glittery nails. That's our effigy for now. Because we also deserve to have an amazing Gillette.

**EN: Why do you call yourselves “fart creatures”?**

**LA CONSCÉURIE DES CONNASSES:**

— We were born from a splash that, as often happens, left without warning. To be a *Gille*, you have to live and have official documents from La Louvière. And you seriously have to be identified with balls; there are no women who are *Gille*. These are fraternities, private clubs, boys’ clubs. We’re fart creatures, because we’ve burst in like a purulent gas in order to queer this little hetero-resembling assembly.

*“The necklace of cans. The absolutely heterogeneous D.N.A. of Brussels.”*



**EN: Anaïs, I turn to you. You're an anthropologist, but also a member of CACA. What is CACA, and how does your knowledge as an anthropologist blend with your active participation in various carnivals?**

**ANAÏS VAILLANT:**

— CACA stands for *Collectif Anonyme du Carnaval Ambulant*<sup>4</sup> [Anonymous Collective of the Travelling Carnival]. It's an anonymous collective, so I can't speak on behalf of others. I'm an anthropologist and, above all, a participant in carnivals in the south of France. I'm part of this informal group, a kind of laboratory, which was created in 2009 in the Languedoc region, near Montpellier, with the aim of gathering independent carnivals and autonomous Mardi Gras, similar to those that once existed in Nice, Marseille and Montpellier. Urban and political carnivals were created – or some might say revived – in the 90s, both to reclaim public space and to satisfy a desire to party. We wanted to bring together these groups, who were already united in solidarity, and also connect with ancestral and so-called ‘traditional’ carnivals. What drives me with the CACA is the search for that uncomfortable yet exciting intersection between, on one hand, an ancient tradition and people claiming to be indigenous, and on the other hand, the appropriations of political traditions. CACA is cool, it's silly, but we also take it very seriously. Carnival is a ritualised moment for this collective, and also a time of negotiation, conflict and risk, which is no easy feat.



**EN: You're wearing an oyster around your neck. What does it represent?**

**ANAÏS VAILLANT:**

— A dead oyster, because only the shell remains. This year, the CACA decided to walk several dozen kilometers from one carnival to the next. We wore it around our necks, and everything we drank had to pass through this pierced shell. It was a way of getting ourselves into rather silly and arduous drinking rituals. Carnival is a time for experiencing, and as some anthropologists say, we're facing an extinction of experiences in many parts of the world. With the CACA, we're on the lookout for things that might be missing and might need to be remembered: like walking, which tends to disappear, and the need to get our bodies moving. This oyster is a souvenir from this 35-kilometer carnival walk.

**EN: Carnaval Sauvage, where does the desire to organize a carnival in Brussels come from? And why 'wild'? You say that 'Carnival is a celebration that the people give to themselves'. How should the people maintain their legitimacy to go out into public space on that day?**

**CARNAVAL SAUVAGE:**

— It's a line from Goethe. At the time, it was the king who spent money to throw parties for the people. In opposition to this practice, the people gave themselves a celebration: Carnival. That's the spirit in which we tried to hold it, without authorisation or subsidies. We started it because it seemed to us that Brussels lacked carnivals. Schaerbeek did have one, but it

didn't suit us because it had been infantilised. Some people think carnival is just for kids, but for us it's a grown-up thing, even if kids can come along.

— We gathered a collective and agreed on a code – because every carnival is built around a code. First of all, we wanted it to be a party. To achieve a certain level of festive energy, the mask offers anonymity, allowing one to escape everyday life and embrace otherness. Another rule we made was not to spend any money. It's our way of preventing the gentrification of carnival, like in Venice or at the Binche Carnival, where being a *Gille* is very expensive. We only use what's free and what we find on the street, junk and especially objects found on the Jeu de Balle flea market.

— At our first meetings, we looked at how carnivals work and at the book *Wilder Mann* by Charles Fréger, released shortly before the first edition of the carnival in 2012. In particular, the figures of the liminal, of animality, of the underworld, and of the underground counterculture active in Brussels. Carnaval Sauvage has been shaped by ancient Greco-Roman and Gaulish myths, featuring motifs like the wild man, the bear, the animal-man, and the devil rising from the earth to end winter. All this cultural magma emerged from folk practices that remain very much alive everywhere.”

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# Experiences of Collective Transformation through Carnival Rituals

Anaïs Vaillant is an anthropologist and artist working in the streets, on stage, and on the airwaves. She explores cultural traditions, appropriations, and inventions in popular festive events in France, Brazil, and elsewhere. Participating in Feral, she drew on the activities of the Collectif Anonyme du Carnaval Ambulant [Anonymous Collective of the Travelling Carnival], an informal activist group that since 2009 has been working to breathe new life into contemporary carnival traditions in different social circles and to bring together so-called traditional carnivals with so-called autonomous carnivals. In this article, we invited her to continue her reflections on the need to perpetuate the carnival experience and spread the narratives of political protest in order to change Carnival.

In recent years, I have observed a renewed interest in popular rituals and traditions within the art world. This surge of curiosity comes at the heart of a more global cultural movement characterised by the sweeping away of the idea of creation *ex nihilo* and the figure of the creative genius, by taking into account what is “already there” and of invisibilised populations and cultures, and also by the aesthetics of writing reality, often inspired by the social sciences and their know-how in the field.

My most recent artistic experiences have led me to observe among colleagues the recurrence of questions, both deep and shared, about the social and political function of artists today and about their break with Art as a secularised religion (Culture) by exploring its potentially sacred, ritualistic and transcendental aspects

(celebration, transe, altered states of consciousness, etc.). What’s more, the new debates around cultural appropriation are forcing artists to guard against the exotic and colonial fascination that could be exerted on them precisely because of this feeling of ritual, and I would even say “cultural”<sup>1</sup> deficiency (culture in the anthropological sense). So, what could it be, this cultural ‘already here’ that enables us to re-establish active links with the places we inhabit, the living and/or invisible entities that pass through us and speak to us? How can we reinvent effective, politically active rituals to put back into action a humanity that, when it’s not fighting to survive or save what’s left of the living, is struggling to “be in the world”?

When as an ethnographer I research so-called ‘wild’ political carnivals,

1. See: [La Batucada des gringos. Appropriations européennes de pratiques musicales brésiliennes](#), Anais Vaillant's doctoral thesis, Aix-Marseille University, 2013.

2. See the works by Pacôme Thiellement on Carnival or "the tradition of those without kings", and the podcast [L'empire n'a jamais pris fin](#).

3. Jean-Louis Tornatore, [Pas de transition sans transe. Essai d'écologie politique des savoirs](#), éditions Dehors, 2023.

4. Also heir to the European counter-cultural revivalism of the 1960s and 1970s.

it's from a conscious humanity that is fighting against this absence in the world, against what has come to be known as the extinction of experience. So I'm travelling into worlds that are invisible or at least unthought – unthinkable – in the heart of the modern West: worlds where communities are consciously seeking a ritual that is lacking in its full version, connecting human beings with each other and with other entities. Worlds where experimental practices respond to the need for a bodily and collective experience of transformation, at once transcendent and immanent. Where each individual seeks to melt into something greater than themselves – community, humanity, all living things and even beyond – to explore what lies beneath and what lies far away, from underground up to the heavens, to communicate with ancestors and prepare to make way for those yet to be born. Certainly, taking philosophical and anthropological detours through stories from distant indigenous animist figures (or nearby monotheists) allows us to shed light on the disaster that has been unfolding for several centuries. It also reveals a still fallow terrain amongst 'intellectuals of human ontology', of a possible persistence of underground traditions in the West as places of popular resistance, of ritual experiences, of bodies and souls placed at the disposal of regimes of truth other than the one which the so-called West continues to export and impose.

Once again, we cannot ignore the fact that Western people possess the knowledge and know-how to generate and interpret communications with the invisible and erratic worlds that make up their environment. We cannot pretend to ignore the fact that the

West which everyone talks about is an oppressor common to the whole of humanity, including its western part. The stories of Western dissidence and what we might more broadly consider to be the 'history of the vanquished' have been extensively researched by historians, medievalists and modernists, providing the greater public with a wealth of knowledge, to the point of influencing pop culture.<sup>2</sup> The hieratic practice of the carnival (from which I exclude all appropriation by republicans, communitarians, capitalists, tourists, etc.), i.e. ritualised carnival practice linked to traditional popular narratives not represented in institutional and mainstream culture, constitutes in my view an alternative space-time of experiences, bodies, narratives, and festivals whose political and magical significance deserves our attention in contemporary Western society today.

A simple ethnography of the emergence of calendar festivals over the last thirty years already highlights the voluntary aspect of the reappropriation of traditions and their reinterpretation by populations that are, for the most part, downtrodden and protesting.<sup>3</sup> A conscious traditionalism<sup>4</sup> is developing in the alternative strata of modern Western society at the same time as historians Hobsbawm and Ranger are theorising about the "invention of tradition" by institutions and those in power: tradition, its stories and rituals, have a legitimising power and an undeniable symbolic effectiveness. The carnivalesque celebrations I observe enable groups and individuals to experiment with this ritual efficacy, not for the purpose of domination but, on the contrary, as a means of popular

*Read the rest of the article p. 38.*



# Threshold: Unbewitching the Fiction of the City of the Future

*(Anti)Speculative Tour*

An artistic intervention for Feral 2024.

Creation by Unbewitch Finance, Inter-Environnement Bruxelles,  
The Laboratory of Insurrectional Imagination, the participants of  
the workshop *Désobéissance Magick*, NGHE / Cheval noir.

Produced and presented by Cifas.

(Anti)Speculative Tour,  
in the frame of  
CARNAVAL DÉCAPITAL,  
from 11h until 14h,  
14.09.2074.  
Departure: at the  
locomotive Place  
des Armateurs  
(Schaerbeek).

"A tour without towers":  
a critical look on the  
reconstitution of  
Brussels 2024.

*It's been more than  
two decades since  
globalised capitalism  
broke down, and  
we're celebrating this  
"big bifurcation" with  
CARNAVAL DÉCAPITAL.  
Carnival is renowned  
for overturning norms.  
We're bringing out  
the relics of the old  
world, fossil-fuelled  
machines, police,  
neckties, systemic  
oppression and other  
curiosities of late  
capitalism. Let's take  
a walk along the canal  
together and remember  
what it was like during  
late capitalism, when  
property developers  
imposed their vision  
of the future city on us.  
Come dressed in your  
best 2024 costumes.*

# Balade (anti) speculative

DANS LE CADRE DU  
CARNAVAL  
DÉCAPITAL

De 11h à 14h

## 14.09 2074

Départ : Locomotive de la  
Place des Armateurs,  
(Esplanade côté Schaerbeek)

### Un tour sans tours

Un regard  
critique sur la  
reconstitution de  
Bruxelles 2024

Voilà plus de deux décennies  
que le capitalisme mondialisé  
s'est cassé la gueule, et que  
nous fêtons cette grande  
bifurcation sur le  
FESTIVAL DÉCAPITAL.

Le carnaval est connu pour être  
un rituel de renversement des  
normes, nous resserrons les  
reliques de l'ancien monde, engins  
à énergie fossile, polices,  
cravates, oppressions systémiques  
et autres curiosités du  
capitalisme tardif.

Nous vous proposons de marcher  
ensemble le long du canal  
pour se remémorer la situation  
pendant le capitalisme tardif,  
lorsque les promoteurs immobiliers  
nous imposaient leur vision de  
la ville du futur.

Venez avec  
vos plus beaux  
costumes  
de 2024 !

0000

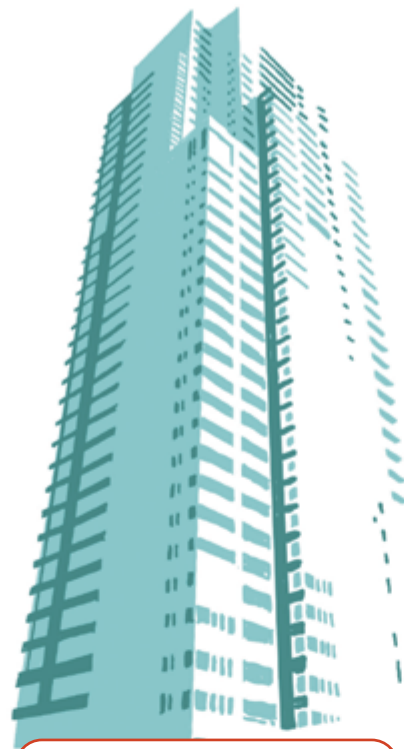


## AN (ANTI)SPECULATIVE TOUR

### GUIDED TOUR OF THE BRUSSELS CANAL ZONE, THE 14<sup>TH</sup> OF SEPTEMBER 2074.

Bassin Vergote is part of the historic Canal Zone, and has changed very little since the 2020s. Characteristic of the late capitalist period, in which areas of tension between the various possible uses of this waterway were concentrated, this territory has long been cursed by the evils of gentrification and touristification. During the wave of post-anomaly reindustrialisation after 2056, a movement to reallocate large sites enabled the development of new units that were closer to meeting the needs of the Brussels residents, and more respectful of socio-environmental realities.

#### BASSIN VERGOTE



#### THE UP-SITE TOWER

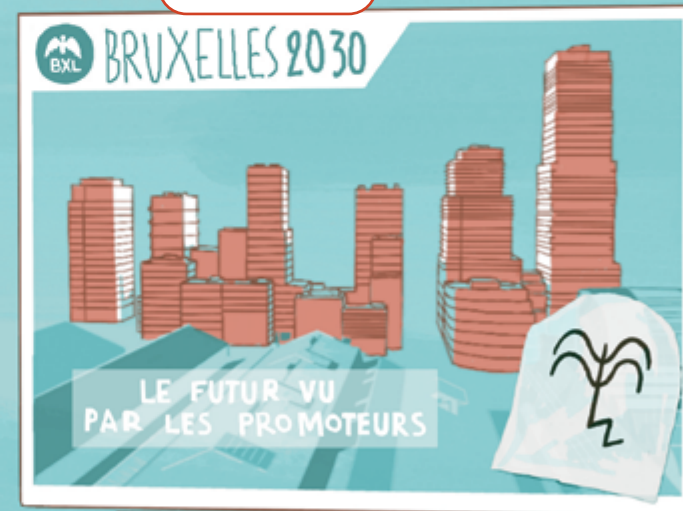
At the foot of this tower, concrete blocks bear witness to a ritual installation created in the 2020s. On a mast weighed down by those blocks, residents would tie pieces of cloth on which they had written curses aimed at real-estate finance and gentrifying powers. This counter-attack ritual lasted for 11 years, and the collective structure became a kind of immense sail which, when the wind was favourable, could wrap itself around the tower and plunge it into darkness. The ritual is said to have played a part in the collapse of the sector a few years later, being like the spark that lit the fuse.

By 2023, capitalism was already living with its own ruins. We might even say it was feeding off them. They were perceived as voids on which to project futures imagined by and for capitalists. These fictions were embodied in 3D simulations that were plastered all over the city. In the mid-2020s, individuals began to systematically deactivate these bewitching images with magic seals. When these sigils appeared in areas coveted by developers, they knew it was too late. Mobilisation was underway: "Developer, it's your turn to be scared for your tower!"



#### KBC AND THE CONSTRUCTION-DEMOLITION CURSE

#### TOUR&TAX



"The future envisioned by developers."

Excerpt from the *Skyline Deprojection Declaration*, published in 2059:  
"Article 1 – The high contracting parties, animals, plants, mushrooms, blobs, spirits of the Tour & Tax zone / Considering that projects by developers and politicians have projected us into the devastated and devastating spaces they had imagined / Observing that our horizons are now blocked by these 35-storey projects / Assuming the need to de-project / Acknowledging that the demolitions of other areas have produced waves of urban imagination / Agreeing to deconstruct the towers of Park Lane just as the patriarchy was deconstructed, i.e. with care and clubs."



Although art and culture are no longer concentrated in closed spaces, and to avoid the economic bewitchment of artworks, the former KANAL contemporary art centre has retained its original function. Now untouched by consumerism, tourism and speculation, it is a self-run space for the circulation of ideas and knowledge. There are multi-purpose rooms designed to meet the various needs of residents' artistic practices, as well as places more specifically dedicated to care, something now associated with creative functions. Popular gatherings are held here, and preparations are in place for public events and celebrations, such as Carnaval Décapital.



A former transit centre for so-called "undocumented migrants" during late capitalism. Before the abolition of borders, it was part of the infrastructure that sorted those considered illegal from those considered "welcome", based on their origin and social status. Currently it is a place of unconditional welcome. It's also here that anti-Frontex stigmatisation rituals are performed, seeking to ward off those borders once and for all.



### PLAYAYA IMMOBILIER

"It's cracking. Slowly, slowly, under our feet. Can't you feel the instability? Large excavators are busy with demolition for the Greater Molenbeek real estate project. They'd have us believe that the banks of the canal are the future 'Promenade des Anglais', but we know that Molenbeek is one of the city's most precarious and densely populated neighbourhoods. We are suffocating and the cracks are serious. We don't want your €295,000 apartments. We want social housing, we want wetlands, we want the beach. We want trees and potato fields. Join Playaya Immobilier, a new, independent real estate agency based on relaxing, pleasure and happiness!" (Mathilde, resident of Molenbeek Beach)

### PETIT CHÂTEAU (LITTLE CASTLE)



### BRIDGE: ENERGY BLOCKING AMULETS

Here and there, energy blocking amulets have been placed under the bridges by the people of Molenbeek. This cultural practice developed post-anomaly in memory of the use of canal bridges as checkpoints, control stations for the forces of a racist and classist order. Considered to be strategic sites of witchcraft energy, the population began to place various blocking amulets there, intended to harm anyone crossing the bridge for the purposes of economic or cultural gentrification. Wonderful.

### MEDUSA, MOTHER OF LACE

In the 2020s-30s, artists began placing artworks in locations where they could not be seen but where they were deemed necessary, no longer as things to be looked at or possessed, but as concentrations of force, energy or meaning, useful to the world. This phenomenon, in which art was removed from the market, from speculation and entertainment, was at first looked at by late capitalism as an anomaly. Then it became commonplace for artists to bury, vaporise, burn, or submerge sculptures and other artefacts. These practices made the canal into one of the most important art centres in the Zenne river watershed.

KANAL

KANAL

empowerment, of getting the social body back into working order, and of gaining access to regimes of truth other than those of capitalist rationalisation and technological progress. It is with full knowledge of the facts that activists, alongside the struggles essential to the survival of many species, mobilise folkloric materials and become experts in non-exotic mythological stories to anchor their bodies, their imaginations, and their actions in the places they are defending. In this way, they extend the time of urgency to a deeper temporality that links past, present, and future generations. For several years now, I have been witnessing joyful, shared, and dynamic forms of whimsical hagiography, free exegesis, heortology

(the science of the festival in its sacred ritual characteristics) and folklorism (in the primary sense of knowledge, analysis, and discourse on popular cultures) with a view to reinventing carnivals in urban and rural settings. Taking over the carnival is part of a movement to reappropriate the public space, offering the possibility of a collective celebration that’s not just entertainment but a transfiguration of places. The traditional nature of the carnival – the fact that the ritual has existed and persisted since time immemorial – gives people, in the face of hostile neighbours and law enforcement, a strong sense of legitimacy to wander through the town singing, playing music, and lighting fires.

The dominant discourse of minimising or treating the carnival<sup>15</sup> as a “fun”, juvenile event or a democratic foil, a safety valve, for a few hours or days to gain acceptance of domination and injustice the rest of the time, has long ceased to have any weight, either in carnival research or among the groups who hold wild carnivals (without authorisation from public authorities). In addition to the legitimising force of tradition, it is the very effectiveness of the ritual that seems to encourage people to invest a significant part of the year in what seems to last just a few hours, but which has to be worked out in advance: imagining a common story, a collective theme, preparing a costume, building a float, sometimes a monumental one, learning songs and musical repertoires, finding allies along the way who can accommodate the groups, welcoming as vital forces those who come from faraway, gathering food for everyone, creating an effigy of power to be burnt, at once serious and amusing...



6. Which goes beyond that of political demonstrations that henceforth also tend to become 'carnivalised' between an activist approach and the demand for a "militant joy".

7. Georges Lapierre, *Être ouragans, écrits de la dissidence*, éditions L'Insomniaque, 2015.

While the carnival welcomes several different gatherings of people, each with its own organisation, the moment of reunion generates a specific collective power,<sup>6</sup> that of a mismatched agglomeration of aesthetics, imaginations, stories, games, humours, musical styles. The meeting marks the first stage of the carnival ritual, a ritual that doesn't allow anyone to say "who's in" or "who's out". It's a secular ritual in which the basic gestures are kept simple and must be followed in a clear sequence. Anyone who arrives by chance will be able to make them their own, to contribute to them without fear of being reprimanded by a liturgical authority. Nevertheless, this does not eliminate the large number of potential conflicts over the ritual itself, over how it is carried out... Even though it remains isolated, individual, interpersonal, there's no truth that would allow one to decide between two opposing parties: the carnival ritual does not subordinate the individual to the collective and does not subordinate the collective to an intimidating overpowering entity. Finally, as an indeterminate and non-exclusive container, the carnival absorbs every "impurity" as a virtuous element for its smooth running. Although it can be spectacular, the carnival ritual is not, strictly speaking, a spectacle. However, the ritual in the public space can be likened in its performance properties to a work of "live entertainment": even if the same show is performed every evening or every year, it will never be exactly the same. This ritual force of sensitive variation is a way of learning that reality cannot be reduced to the gestures, words, and temporalities imagined beforehand. It is recomposed by the confrontation of all these elements with the context,

the climate, the unexpected, the new arrivals, their current state. Many surprises are thrown in to enrich the ritual, to contribute to the magic of the moment by surprising the community with material and immaterial offerings such as built structures, songs, dances, speeches... These bursts of creativity and ingenuity make the carnival a place charged with intelligence, sensitivity, and political awareness.

In this initial ritual moment of gathering and discovery, everyone can connect with humanity through forms of intelligence other than those that advocate and work towards technological and/or rationalist progress: human intelligences of the sensitive, the aesthetic, the farcical, of experience as discovery of oneself and others, of our differences and our common possibilities.

Connecting with other species and the invisible may come later: perhaps it's an anthropologist's distortion, but it is first and foremost as a human being that I like to connect with others, and primarily with living humans. I could be accused of anthropocentrism, I admit, but how can we relate to other species without first trying to relate to our own species? The ontological turning point, or Copernican Revolution, has changed our perspective of the centrality of human societies, but even if I don't put humans at the centre, it's from this decentred humanity, which has taken a step to the side, that I can relate to others. What's more, only humans have a priori ritual responsibility.

*Read the rest of the article online, on the [Cifasothèque](#).*



# The Ritual, Theatre of Magic?

In search of alternative modes of interaction and communication beyond those traditionally associated with art spaces, like the white cube of galleries and museums or black box theatre, many performing and outdoor artists are turning to the ritual to subvert representation and deconstruct the usual relationship between audience and artist. Whether they carry out actions in the public space that put their own bodies at risk or propose formats similar to activist mobilisations, their interventions aim to bring about social and political transformation. The use of other artistic media also allows them to sculpt their speculative gestures, which are intended to prefigure future worlds:<sup>1</sup> prior to performing ritual acts, they activate the imagination through collective writing practices that prefer to offer an experience in the public space rather than put on a show.

The ritual thus allows us to experience another way of connecting with each other and with the places we care about. It provides a more direct response to the crisis of sensible<sup>2</sup> that our Western societies are going through. As a tool for connection and alliance, a form of (re)connection to life, it counters the individualism of the market economy and helps us to overcome the state of paralysis into which globalised capitalism has plunged us. Also serving the cause of social emancipation, it is an act of radical resistance denouncing the systemic oppressions that threaten access to the public space as well as the right to it by and for all.

With a firm determination to subvert power relations and restore our capacity for action, the artists discourse in this chapter use magic as a science of the imagination as an integral part of our every moment in the world. As an “art of changing consciousness at will,”<sup>3</sup> it engages us because it is not merely contemplative or representational, but also ideomotor and agential.<sup>4</sup> With its potential to overflow, it collides with reality and causes it to waver.

1. Isabelle Stengers & Didier Debaise (éd.), Gestes spéculatifs, Les Presses du Réel, 2015.

2. Estelle Zhong Mengual & Baptiste Morizot, “L’illisibilité du paysage: Enquête sur la crise écologique comme crise de la sensibilité”, Nouvelle revue d’esthétique, 2018/2, p. 87.

3. Starhawk, Rêver l’obscur. Femmes, magie et politique, Cambourakis, 2015.

4. Charles Stépanoff, Voyager dans l’invisible. Techniques chamaniques de l’imagination, La Découverte, 2019.



“No one lives everywhere; everyone lives somewhere.  
Nothing is connected to everything.  
Everything is connected to something.  
Who are you connected to and how?  
Feel the uniqueness and closeness of your connections.  
Remember that we are not individuals but ecosystems.  
We are not a unit but an entanglement of symbiotic  
relationships.  
We are not distinct, autonomous and watertight  
in an environment that merely surrounds us.  
We are the environment.  
We are the landscape.  
We are the world.  
We are all lichen.”

Jean-Baptiste Molina, [Ecoscopie sorcière](#)<sup>5</sup>



5. In "Rituels #2", [Journal de Culture & Démocratie](#), n°57, dec. 2023.

Drawing of the performance [Kall for Healing](#) by crazynist artist, 12 September 2024 at La Fonderie, Brussels, Feral 2024.

# Dance, Disorder and Contemporary Ritual: the Case of UNRUHE

Nolwenn Peterschmitt was born in Strasbourg and is co-director of the Marseille-based collective Groupe Crisis, with Laurène Fardeau. Her artistic practice constantly shifts between her research into acting, its raw embodiment, and dance as a manifestation of desire. *UNRUHE* initially focuses on Saint-Guy's Dance, a dance epidemic that infected the inhabitants of Strasbourg in 1518. Through the study of this curious phenomenon and the socio-political context from which it arose, *UNRUHE* enquires into individual and collective impulses, and into dance as a vital need. The permissive ritual reveals an unconscious narrative of the collective body – its impediments, its violence, its poetry. This intervention at Feral reflects the different stages of the dramaturgical and energetic construction of the *UNRUHE* ritual, as well as the issues that have emerged through experimentation with audiences.

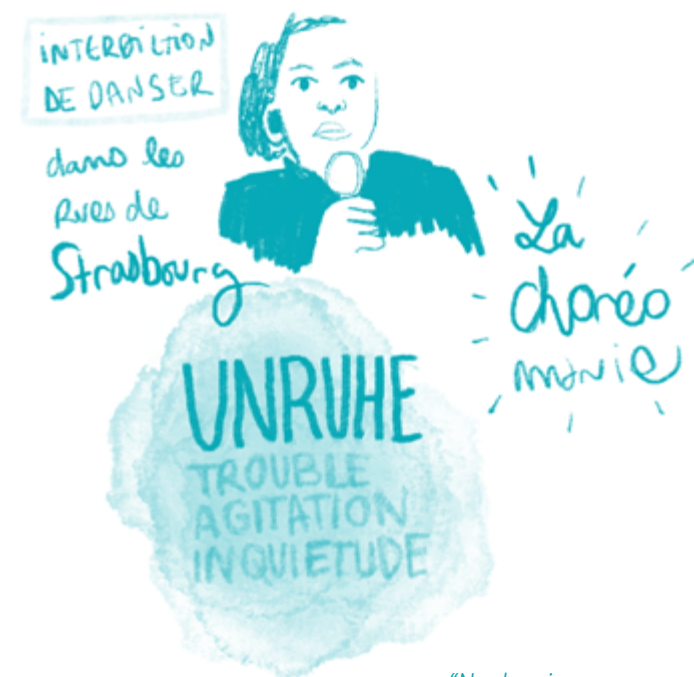
"*UNRUHE* was born out of a need for a great collective adventure and the desire to go outside. I come from a performing arts background, and have spent a lot of time in enclosed spaces, some of which have an architecture resembling courthouses more than places designed for relationships and communication. I was looking for a more experimental adventure and to explore the question: is it possible to live something together, to challenge ourselves collectively, to break down the hierarchy and to deconstruct the relationship between the audience and performers on stage?"

I've always been fascinated by the history of the late Middle Ages, which marked a significant paradigm shift. Like the Dancing Plague that took place in 1518 in Strasbourg, my hometown. Have you heard of it? It's a fascinating event that inspired the project: people began dancing frenetically and uncontrollably in front of the cathedral, contaminating each other until there were more than two hundred unable to stop, for days and nights. It was in the middle

of a scorching July. The Strasbourg magistracy (the ruling authority at the time), completely overwhelmed by the event, decided to confine all these people to guild houses, where craftsmen used to meet. It then decreed a ban on dancing in the streets and in the houses, and also prohibited the use of fifes and drums, which were too likely to warm up and excite people's hearts. The dancers were given wine and barley soup, hoping it would calm them down, which didn't work. Musicians were even hired to play soft music for them. It didn't work. So, in an attempt to contain the epidemic, the dancers were transported out of town in carts to the grotto at Saint-Vit, near Saverne, in the Vosges mountains. They turned around the icon of Saint-Guy, the patron saint believed to cure dancing mania, epilepsy, madness and incurable diseases. And then, it stopped.

Cases of choreomania – dancing mania – were recorded between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries across the Rhineland, in Zurich, Aachen, and Molenbeek! The various interpretations of this myth over the years reveal much about the societies they come from. Some claimed that it was a woman who had started dancing and contaminated everyone; that it was an astral conjunction that caused the blood of certain people to heat up; that they had eaten ergot fungus... Many theories have tried to explain this phenomenon, but to this day, we still don't know what happened. It was a highly enriching and stimulating topic for the UNRUHE team.

'Unruhe' means turmoil, agitation, worry, but also riot. We also translated it by asking the question: how do you create the conditions for your own overflow? Concerning the relationship



*"No dancing allowed in the streets of Strasbourg; Choreomania; 'Unruhe': turmoil, agitation, worry."*

between the audience and the stage, the issue that arose was how to create an experience. I didn't want the spectators to watch performers who were supposedly in a trance. The challenge was finding a framework that would allow them to dive into another kind of relationship. And we finally ended up with a five-stage ritual.

I really enjoy working on how we open up and make ourselves available to welcome a story as it wants to emerge, rather than controlling a narrative.

There was an experimentation period when sociological issues came into play, almost unintentionally. It is a moment of loud sound volume: we worked on the carnival energy. Through research on impulsive behavior, energy contamination, without frills, with joy and celebration, but also indecently, violently and questioning the scapegoat figure. We wondered how far we could go, what we had to lay down and let go of in order to generate transformation in this rite.

1. Historian Gregor Rohmann, Tanzwut. Kosmos, Kirche und Mensch in der Bedeutungsgeschichte eines mittelalterlichen Krankheitskonzepts, ed. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013.

2. The young Nahel Merzouk is a victim of police brutality, shot dead during a roadside check, in June 2023. His death sparked riots across France and beyond, followed by a strong repression from the government.

But this couldn't be a place open to the audience in the same way as other moments of sharing. Because believing we are free from everything, despite our different life paths, can lead to horror, like entering the energetic kinesphere of another body and burning all frames of consent. Instead of revealing a narrative in this collective moment of care, where we ask ourselves what we all need to heal together, we end up replaying domination processes. I no longer knew how we were going to get out of it. How could we investigate without disconnecting from the audience? How could we avoid turning it into a show and stay true to our commitment to experience something together? And if I opened all the doors, what would we discover?

Diving into these altered states of body and consciousness took us quite some time: we spent three years working with the performers to unlock our bodies. Transe is not a term I use to describe my practice; however, I work a lot on embodiment: how to manage letting go, falling, giving up, dying a little bit in order to vitalise the body on stage and connect with ourselves, others, the cosmos, animate and inanimate matter... The possessed from Strasbourg are archetypes who raise the question of body disorder as a potential border with the sacred. Could they be, in an artistic and symbolic context, some kind of ritual intermediary, cathartic beings who, through their relationship to transgression, offer a link to the invisible? The German historian Gregor Rohmann<sup>1</sup> says that, during peasant celebrations in the late Middle Ages, certain rounds served to reconnect with the course of

the spheres, the cosmos, and to relink the world above and the world below. We decided to begin *UNRUHE* with a round to create an energetic source, to encourage a collective availability to step into this challenge. This round digs the first hole, like the shamanic drums calling us to fall into the world below. Relating in a different way requires getting into condition: there's a first airlock to pass through.

*UNRUHE* was created during the riots that followed Nahel<sup>2</sup>'s murder. We were in Marseille, the streets were filled with tension, and we feared (or hoped!) that things might get out of hand. In a politically charged atmosphere, this act in the public space sparked a potential of desire and clash. I felt there was a need to create spaces that not only allowed us to feel good together and reassure each other, but where we could also collectively test ourselves, in order to invent new ways of relating."

# Performance as an Act of Radical Resistance

Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi, aka crazinistT artistT, is a Ghanaian multidisciplinary artist, curator, and mentor. She uses performance and installation to investigate gender stereotypes, prejudice, queerness, identity politics and conflicts, sexual stigmatisation, and their consequences for marginalised people. As founder of the perfocraZe International Artist Residency (plAR), which is currently threatened by anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation in Ghana, Va-Bene reflects, during *Feral*, on the origins of her engagement and her performance practice.

“I’m speaking about performance as an act of radical resistance.

I would want us to watch this performance in our mind.

So let us all close our eyes and watch together:

You are walking to the middle of a highway street in Ghana, Africa, West Africa.

The street is full of cars honking, people screaming, and hawkers. The street is very loaded, like you would have witnessed in many Latin American countries as well.

Standing in the middle of the street is a cross made from wood in an X shape.

There is a body chained up high, more than six feet above the ground.

The hands are chained apart in opposite directions.

The legs are chained apart in opposite directions.

The body looks like an X on the cross.

There she screams: ‘Save us. Save us. Save us. We are dying. We are crying. We are dying. We are crying. Save us. Save us.’

Some passers-by stop by watching. Drivers stop by 30 seconds to ask questions. What is going on here? Motor riders park, watch closely and continue their journey.

The voice continues: ‘Save us. Save us. Save us. We are dying. We are dying. We are crying. We are crying.’

After 30 minutes, some strangers scream: ‘She is dying! Her voice is going. She is dying. What can we do?’

A group of people walk close to the cross, struggling to remove the body. They climb. The chains are so entangled that they cannot easily be



1. The "Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill", tabled in the Parliament in 2021, provides for imprisonment for a person who has had same-sex relations or for the "promotion, sponsorship or intentional support of LGBTQIA+ activities". Enacted and then repealed with the dissolution of Parliament in December 2024, a new version was reintroduced in March 2025.

2. Arthur Miller's theatre piece *Crucible* (1953).

3. Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi refers to a television programme broadcast on a national channel in which a politician publicly incites the murder of people from the LGBTQIA+ community and intimidates anyone who opposes the bill.

removed. They try.

The voices continue. 'We are dying. We are dying. Save us. Save us. Save us. We are dying. We are dying. Save us.'

They manage to remove the body, lay it on the floor and take out a bottle of water to give to the dying body.

The video is paused. You can open your eyes.

The question for us to reflect on and contemplate is that if Christ should come back today as a black person, who will kill him? Who will kill her? Who will kill them? Who will kill it? If Christ should come back today as a woman, as a disabled, crippled, blind, deaf, dumb...

Perhaps we are not imagining Christ to come back as black, as a woman, as trans, as queer. Possibly Christians will kill Christ. The people who killed Christ were not pagans. Christ was killed by the same people, by the community he belonged to.

This was one of my performances on the street of Ghana in 2021, when the anti LGBTQIA+ bill<sup>1</sup> was officially proposed and accepted by the Parliament for discussion. Because we cannot talk about the queer struggle or anti-blackness, without even talking about religion.

The mediaeval time is still relevant. Religion was a very big role player. And in Ghana, the Christians are the crusaders today against the queer community, because they were taught by the missionaries that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God because of homosexuality.

It just reminds me of the book *Crucible*,<sup>2</sup> a narrative about the Salem witch trial in the USA, where

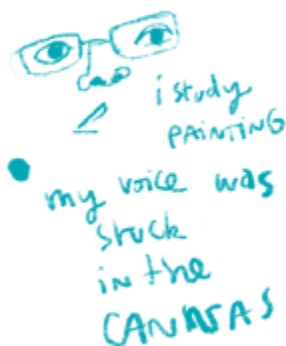
these young girls were dancing in the forest and performing their own ritual and enjoying their own characters. Because rituals have been demonised by the one standing religion above all.

Similarly in Ghana right now, if this bill is signed, if I just point a finger at you as gay, whether you are gay or not, I don't care, you will be murdered. And this is the unleashing of the beast in our time. How different is this from the crusaders?

I have no academic background in performance or theatre or even play or even storytelling. I studied painting. But I realised that my voice was trapped in the canvas. My body was fixated on this flatness.

It felt like I could be a drag queen on the stage and that is fine; but I cannot walk on the street freely as a trans woman. The theatre hall can be filled with ten thousand people in the audience, political, religious, whatever, to watch a drag queen in a club smile and enjoy. But the same people cannot, cannot, CANNOT accept a trans woman in their families, in their homes, in their churches, in their schools, or even on the train. That forced me to remove my body from the canvas and put it in the public space. Because putting my body in a public space becomes a direct confrontation. It's for me to reveal the horrors that we suffer. At the same time, it's for me to allow the audience to experience what they never see.

If you have not seen it, it doesn't mean that transphobia, homophobia, sexism, racism and all the horrors don't exist. It's just that you never experienced it.



4. The day before her talk, Va-Bene had ended her performance Kall for Healing with this public statement.

But in person, it becomes something different for you to encounter. Because there is a body breathing, there is a direct connection. And that was how my performances were born, since a decade ago.

So that is the reality. This is not a movie. This is on national television.<sup>3</sup> This is happening in our time that politicians, pastors, preachers, are speaking on the television motivating other young people to attack queer people. And for that reason, it becomes even more important and urgent for me to take the public space into my own hands.

Because queer people can't come on the street and organise a protest. No way. Nothing protects them. You (here, in Belgium) are able to protest in many places because protesting itself is protected. We don't have that privilege. My body becomes the platform for the protest, for a collective resistance. Because I cannot guarantee the lives of other people if I take them onto the streets. But I can see myself ready to die. And this is why yesterday, I made a statement that I no longer fight for my own freedom, but for the freedom of those who are yet to be born.<sup>4</sup>

Because there are several ways to win a battle. Sometimes you need to go back to jail to be able to. But sometimes you can be outside of the prison, and still free the people. And this is why, in 2014, I have declared myself already dead. Because dead people don't die.

So each time I go to the streets to perform, the first ritual I perform is my own burial. I know it's possible that some homophobes may be

so provoked, that I can be shot on the cross. Because the cross is not enough. The suffering, the awaiting might not be enough. So I have to be prepared mentally to be able to accept death if it comes. And that's the declaration of death. An acceptance of death. And that's the ritual that keeps me going. I'll be 43 next week. I never thought I could still be here until even 40. The fight is real.



→ [crazinistartist.com](http://crazinistartist.com)

Le Laboratoire  
d'Imagination  
Insurrectionnelle  
[The Laboratory  
of Insurrectional  
Imagination] (FR)  
& Désorceler  
la finance  
[Unbewitch  
Finance] (BE)

# From Activism to Animism: Becoming the Territory and Unbewitching the Narratives of Late Capitalism

Isa Frémeaux – trainer, facilitator and author, and Jay Jordan – author, witch, part-time sex worker and full-time troublemaker, founded the Laboratory of Insurrectional Imagination: a collective bringing together artists and activists to devise new forms of creative resistance. In 2012, they left the city to live on a ZAD (Zone to Defend) in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, where they co-founded the Cellule d'Actions Rituelles [Ritualistic Actions Cell] with the duo -h-. Unbewitch Finance (DLF), an independent, self-run, “wild” laboratory based in Brussels. This transdisciplinary space brings together artists, researchers, and activists who use the tools of magic to unwrite the fiction of late capitalism and imagine alternatives. At Feral, it was embodied by Aline Fares, Amandine Faugère, Jean-Baptiste Molina and Emmanuelle Nizou. To begin the conversation, the two collectives asked each other questions about the power of imagination and the place of magic in their respective artistic and activist practices. This conversation reflects the intentions and evolution of their rituals as a way of creating a shared narrative around the memory of a struggle, but also as a possibility of imagining a world free of capitalism.

**Unbewitch Finance (UF): “The Laboratory of Insurrectional Imagination, how would you frame your approach? Based on your experience with rituals in Notre-Dame-des-Landes’ Zone To Defend, do you consider them as a tool for community care?”**

**THE LABORATORY OF INSURRECTIONAL IMAGINATION (LII):**

Since 2004, we’ve been working to bring together artists and activists to create forms of disobedience in public space. We live in this Zone To Defend, where an airport would have been built if a 50-year struggle hadn’t caused this project to fail in 2018. The occupation movement emerged following the massive 2012 military operation<sup>1</sup>, which was defeated by the resistance; and the airport project was abandoned after a second state-led operation of revenge against this collective movement. Many internal conflicts have arisen due to the difficulty in finding common ground. From our point of view, the community of this Zone To Defend has suffered multiple traumas. And because its struggle has opened up a utopian and idealised horizon for many in France and abroad, it has also sparked a genuine battle of narratives. We created the Ritual Action Cell there because we felt that the ritual form had the potential to provide a space of care, that changed the habits of a struggling territory. Through the aesthetics of gestures and the engagement of senses, it allows us to connect with each other in a way that doesn’t usually exist. Taking on the ritual was no easy task, as the term itself can provoke significant reluctance within left-wing revolutionary movements. We proposed

rituals at key moments, such as the anniversary of the airport’s abandonment and important dates in the pagan calendar, to celebrate the reconnection with the cycle of the seasons: the equinoxes, solstices, Beltane...

**LII: Rituals are an ancient biotechnology that helps us connect with one another within a community, but also to connect with the more-than-human. In a patriarchal, colonial, capitalist society built on separation and dualism, we need these weaving tools to restore our connections with each other. What was your perspective on the ritual within Unbewitch Finance ?**

**UF (Aline Fares):** In the early days of Unbewitch Finance, I had just quit my job at an NGO in Brussels dealing with banking regulation. I was disgusted by the extent of the inertia of the institutions: we hadn’t made even the slightest progress since the financial crisis. At that time, I was suffering from a very disabling disease, rheumatoid arthritis. According to an acupuncturist I had consulted, it was related to anger, as if my physical incapacity reflected the tremendous anger and political powerlessness I felt. We wanted to organise rituals to overcome this widespread anger, creating a collective moment that would help us to reclaim our power and strength by bringing to light possibilities and narratives that we had not yet seen, or had not seen enough of.

**UF:** We start from the assumption that capitalism has a sorcerous grip, like some kind of spell. We develop witchcraft tools like rituals to break the spell and disconnect

"The sacred is what  
you're willing to fight for"



us from finance. Our approach to magic is neither transcendental nor mystical: we do not invoke external forces – such as spirits – which Western rationality would consider supernatural, although we respect the cultures that practice this kind of witchcraft... Above all, we try to figure out how these social mechanisms affect our communities and us, as individuals. *Our Financial Spell-Clearing Rituals*<sup>2</sup> target a specific financial market within a given territory – the beer market or the real estate market in Brussels or the seed market in Aurillac... To root ourselves in this territory, we start with a research phase with the concerned people, those in debt or suffering from an unfair and paralysing system. Then, we always present the information publicly. We quickly realised that this educational moment was not enough, because the data on capitalism, the militarisation of the world, financialisation, borders... is disempowering. Rituals are a way of overcoming the state of shock caused by this accumulation. Then comes the time for ritual actions where we trigger sensory, visual, olfactory, auditory and symbolic stimuli. The ritual intensifies up until the moment we physically cut the tie with finance using an axe. We end with a phase we call 'The Days After', where we put up posters of speculative newspaper articles that we'd like to see turn into reality.

**UF: It's a spectacular setup with a strong performative aspect, even though our rituals also invite the audience to participate. With the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination you say that performance and theatre are**

**impoverished forms of ritual, with no place and with gestures that lack a shared meaning for the community. Could you elaborate on this point and clarify why you refer to rituals as 'the theatre of magic'?**

**LII:** From a historical point of view, Art as an autonomous discipline was born in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, at the same time as a dualistic way of thinking that perceived the artist as an individual, a genius. It was also the period when finance emerged and machines that burned coal and destroyed our atmosphere were invented. Finance and art are machines that divide, while rituals and ceremonies, which are the origin of performance art and theatre, serve as tools of connection. We believe it's important to destroy all these dualisms, especially between spectators and actors. Ellen Dissanayake, an American anthropologist who has written on the origins of art, says that rituals appear in almost all societies, and 'makes an important thing become special'. Nolwenn Petterschmitt talks about the end of a paradigm in the Middle Ages, and you mention the end of late capitalism. We are witnessing the end of a dualistic, colonial, patriarchal world: it's time to stop with theatre and performances! Rituals only work when all the aesthetic elements of theatre are present – costumes, masks, stage sets... – AND the activation of all five senses. They shouldn't be there to shape the career of an artist or an elite, but to strengthen a community by connecting it to a territory. That's how something important becomes special! We like the definition of the sacred





"We imagine more easily the end of the world than the end of capitalism."

given by Starhawk, which is not this grand thing before which we kneel, but rather what defines our values, what we are willing to fight for. In Notre-Dame-des-Landes, we fell in love with the land and we're ready to defend it from a toxic infrastructure.

**LII: Unbewitch Finance, the form of your rituals has changed a lot. Nowadays, you're leaning more towards speculative fiction. Why is that?**

**UB:** Yes, it's been a long time since we really organised any major spectacular rituals. We've developed other tools, such as the *Re-opening Horizons* card-readings. We are currently experimenting with techniques to travel through our imagination. According to us, it's a witchcraft practice because it involves travelling into the invisible as well. It's not pejorative, but our society has transformed imagination into something childish and superficial. Yet, we are definitely going through an imagination crisis: we are not able to imagine anything else than the end of the world. In our *Investigation Into Anomaly*, we compile narratives in which 'capitalistologists' from the future investigate how late capitalism disappeared. In our *Chronostestic Autopsy*, we explore altered states of consciousness: we immerse listeners in the narrative landscape of the world of the future after the collapse of capitalism. Travelling through the imaginary is truly powerful, as it allows us to think the unthinkable and the unthought.

**UB: Rituals can be a way of bringing people together, bonding them and creating**

**a shared narrative. They also establish conditions for alternative possibilities and the writing of other stories than those of the 'enemy', through the power of imagination and fiction. With the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, where do you stand in this battle of imaginations?**

**LII:** Any struggle is a battle of imaginations. A struggle is a group of people presenting reality as X while we believe it could be something different. We're rooted in the awareness that everything we take for granted, whether it's the right of people who identify as women to wear trousers, the right to strike, the right to vote, the end of child labour, the right to abortion, comes from people who were invariably thought to be mad. Because they fought for ideas that always seemed unattainable at first, even shocking and immoral, and used their ability to imagine a different and improved reality, to create a narrative and to implement practices that would make things happen. The rituals we propose in the Zone To Defend serve the dual purpose of projecting an imaginary of what might be possible and preserving the memory of a past struggle. The genealogy of struggles is essential: we keep starting from scratch, whereas if we had transgenerational memories, things could be easier.

3. [The 6 points on the future of the ZAD.](#)

4. Marc Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Zero books, 2009.

5. For more details, see [antemonde.org/recueils/batir-aussi](http://antemonde.org/recueils/batir-aussi)

6. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, Autonomedia, 2004.

— We make no distinction between art, magic and activism. In magic, you set an intention and channel a significant amount of energy into it to transform reality. The same goes for activism. You state the intention to stop the construction of an airport, you bring in 60,000 people, and then things change. Artist Alan Kaprow says art is simply about paying attention to something. It's thanks to acts of magic that we succeeded in Notre-Dame-des-Landes. In 2014, local farmer-activists gathered and wrote a text detailing how we were going to manage the land and break free from capitalism through commons rather than private property. This text doesn't say 'No, we are against the airport' but rather, 'No, there will be no airport'. That's the magical act. You create reality in the present. The key, the magical act, was to live *as if* capitalism no longer existed.

**LII: Angela Davis says: 'You must act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time'. The magic happens on the edge between reality and fiction, inviting us to live as if we were in a post-capitalist world. Writer Amitav Ghosh, who writes about literary and artistic forms in the context of a climate and post-colonial crisis, believes that fiction conceals reality: it would be a form of concealment that prevents us from recognising the reality of a situation, from being present to it. It seems to be the opposite for you: you embrace fiction, you stand on the edge of what is real and what is not.**

**UB:** British theorist Mark Fisher develops the concept of 'capitalist

realism"<sup>4</sup>, according to which capitalism is a fiction that has become our sole reality. 'There is no alternative', it's Thatcher's spell that has come true. So, proposing fictions of post-capitalist struggle opens up possibilities, but not materialising them and leaving them as mere fiction only reinforces the logic of capitalist realism. In other words, alternatives are just pretty little stories. However, you can't simply think them up and fictionalise them, you must bring them to life concretely: within our laboratory, we are materially engaged in struggles, both individually and collectively.

— We discovered a practice of collective speculation through *Les Ateliers de l'Antémonde* [the workshops of the Altworld], authors of *Bâtir aussi*<sup>5</sup> [To Build As Well], who present a fiction based on the Arab Spring of 2011. It has since become a strategic tool. We forced ourselves to imagine our victories in order to go further in a ultra-thrilling imaginary world through very concrete and immediate actions. Indeed, fiction spills over. You could say that beyond realistic capitalism, we are creating realistic post-capitalist fiction.

— We are also inspired by the concept of ambiguous utopia, cherished by Ursula Le Guin. The forking in our narratives always unfolds through a complex sequence of events and revolutions that lead to the collapse of capitalism and nation-states. That's how we wipe the slate clean. However, it's not necessarily the best of all worlds: even if we break away from capitalism and authoritarianism, there will always be violence linked to their resurgence. And it's already

ambiguous, as ecological panic is likely to occur. We are interested in imagining socially desirable worlds and continuing the fight within these utopias.

**LII:** It's in the Zone To Defend that I really experienced what a culture of resistance is all about. Anyone can step in and ask themselves: 'Which of my skills can be helpful in this fight? How can what supports me and sustains me be useful?' This is where speculative fiction can play a part: by exploring what I would do in the world I want and then building it. This dual movement can be implemented every day and at any time, not just during specific moments organised by specific groups. And then it turns into non-fiction, into documentary.

*"Destroy all forms of dualisms. The fire has to start, otherwise we don't know what's going to happen."*

**UB:** In conclusion, in *Caliban and the Witch*, Silvia Federici<sup>6</sup> tells us that the primitive accumulation of capital required witch hunts and their disappearance. We like the idea that capitalism will crash with the return of witches, and we truly believe in it. And there are plenty of people around the world who go looking for ancient witchcraft practices and update them in a contemporary way with a subversive, punk, anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist intention. The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, you are in contact with people in North America like Starhawk. Do you agree that we should create an intercoven, an international alliance to dismantle capitalism?

**LII:** Yes, and we could say that Feral is the place where this alliance began!"



# Welcoming Gestures, Hospitality Rituals

“So today we are supposed to talk about world-building. The first thing that comes to mind is the idea of creating something new. Of building a new, different world.”

Ursula K. Le Guin, “Making worlds”<sup>1</sup>

Artists and activist collectives are entering the public sphere, aware that this relational space reenacts socio-political power relations. They create alliances and communities of care to enable alternative models of social organisation with all the actors concerned, which are sometimes marginalised and invisibilised – both human and non-human. Through a common political gesture, they create mechanisms that establish experimental relationships and consider the plurality of existences and forms of life. With Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert, ritual practices of mutual aid and solidarity are an opportunity to regain power in a Europe that’s in a hospitality crisis.

At Back2SoilBasics, the attention paid to those relegated to the margins reinforces the creation of collective singularities. Thanks to these unprecedented associations, other ways of world-making emerge.

1. Ursula K. Le Guin, Dancing at the Edge of the World. Thoughts on Words, Women, Places, Grove Press, 1989.





Designed  
by “Training  
for Change”<sup>1</sup>  
and used by  
Laboratory of  
Insurrectional  
Imagination  
during its  
Désobéissance  
Magick workshop,  
Diversity  
Welcome is  
a framework  
for welcoming  
diversity. Here is  
an adaptation by  
Marine Thévenet,  
director of Cifas,  
on the second  
day of Feral.

# Bienvenue — Diversity Welcome

## **We would like to welcome:**

Our bodies and the different ways we live and engage with them

## **Welcome;**

The many feelings we have about the worlds in which we live: our anxiety, our nervousness, our hope, our despair, our terror, our confusion, our sense of powerlessness, but also the part of us that feels connected, that feels powerful, that feels happy

## **Welcome;**

Our different levels of ability: those who identify themselves as having a disability, whether visible or invisible, and those who do not

## **Welcome;**

Our different states of health: those who self-identify as healthy or not, those who live with chronic illnesses, physical pain

## **Welcome;**

The different ways our brains work and process information

## **Welcome;**

Our different levels of education: those who have experience of formal education at different levels and those who don't, those who are familiar with workshops and those who aren't

## **Welcome;**

Our different ways of learning: visual learning, verbal learning, learning by reading, by doing, by problem-solving, by storytelling and all the other ways of learning; those who are excited by the size of this group and those who find it daunting

## **Welcome;**

Activists, organisers, change-makers and those who don't identify themselves as such

## **Welcome;**

Artists, creative people and those who don't identify themselves as such

## **Welcome;**

All our genders: those who identify as trans, non-binary, male, female, on or off the gender spectrum, all the ways we experience and express our genders

## **Welcome;**

All our origins: Latino heritage, African heritage, Southwest Asian and North African heritage, Asian and Pacific heritage, European heritage and people of mixed or multiple heritage

## **Welcome;**

1. Training for Change is an international organisation which proposes facilitation, direct education and empowerment tools for communities and activists' groups.

Migrants, whether by choice or not, and people living in the country where they were born

**Welcome;**

The languages spoken here

**Welcome;**

Our social classes: working class, middle class, wealthy class, those who don't know where they fit into these definitions and all the different contexts of class dynamics from which we're coming from

**Welcome;**

Our sexualities: those who are sexually active and those who aren't, those who use labels and those who don't, those who identify as gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, heterosexual and all the ways in which we experience our sexualities

**Welcome;**

Our ages: 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s

**Welcome;**

Our beliefs, traditions and religious practices, those who identify themselves as atheists, agnostics, seekers, pagans or none of the above

**Welcome;**

Our elders, our ancestors: those who are still with us, and those who have passed away

**Welcome;**

All those who make it possible for us to be here: the team behind this event, our organisations, our groups, our families – genetic and chosen – our friends, our supporters

**Welcome;**

The land that we inhabit and that inhabits us, and to the more-than-human without whom we could not be here

**Welcome;**

And all the people who were here yesterday and who are joining us today.

**Welcome.**

Anyuta  
Wiazemsky  
Snauwaert  
(RU/BE) &  
Anna Czapski  
(FR/BE)

# A Ceremony for New Belgian Citizens

Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert is a multidisciplinary artist working in visual arts, theatre, and participatory art. Their work focuses on intimacy, which they explore from different angles by delving into their own psyche and sharing their personal experiences until they are no longer personal. Inspired by the book *Coping Rituals in Fearful Times*,<sup>1</sup> Anyuta offers workshops to help participants devise a welcoming ritual for new Belgian citizens. This long journey of research and collection, both intimate and collective, will lead to the first performance-ceremony, *overBELGingsfeest: A Threshold of Belonging*,<sup>2</sup> which will take place in 2025 in Ostend. Artist and dramaturg Anna Czapski took part in the workshop *A Ceremony for New Belgian Citizens* held at Feral. Here, she enters into conversation with Anyuta's work, intersecting it with her own experiences as a participant, an artist passionate about rituals, and a potential new Belgian citizen.

1. Jeltje Gordon-Lennox (ed.), Coping Rituals in Fearful Times: An Unexplored Resource for Healing, ed. Springer, 2022.

2. [wiazemsky.eu/verbelgingsfeest-a-threshold-of-belonging](http://wiazemsky.eu/verbelgingsfeest-a-threshold-of-belonging)

When Anyuta became a Belgian in 2012, it was at the end of a long process that demanded lots of energy and nerve. After many tears and fears, a municipal employee handed them a card and that was it.

There was no one at the end of the journey to say: "Congratulations. You've made it."

The whole process had been impersonal and superficial.

But Anyuta wanted to have this nationality. They wanted to find meaning in it but would have wished for more than a paper. They would have liked a *before* and an *after*.

Yet there are many welcoming ceremonies around the world. In France, it's quite patriotic. New citizens are welcomed by a film about the army. In Ireland, it's already much more interesting. The Minister of Justice themselves gives a speech to all the new Irish citizens.

It goes something like this: "Thank you for choosing to be Irish. You come here with everything you are and becoming Irish doesn't take away from your roots. We are delighted that all your cultures are enriching Ireland."

Anyuta would like to contribute to making newly arrived Belgian citizens feel equally welcome. And so began their research into what a welcoming ritual – and perhaps one day a truly national ceremony – could be.

Becoming or welcoming new Belgians, what does that mean, as a community? What kind of country do we want to be? What is nationality in a world that needs to be decolonised?

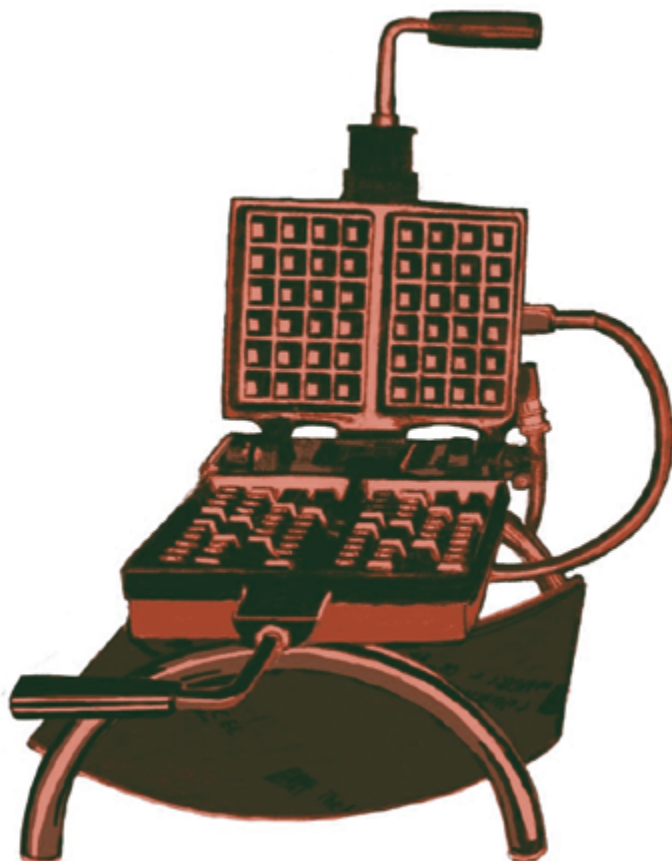
As it's a collective affair, a series of workshops has been launched, aimed at refining the ceremony via forms inspired by those issued by the administration.

This is a subject that interests me. I was Polish until I was 12, and then, along with my family we became French. I still wonder today if I should not reclaim this lost nationality and even whether it's possible to have three, by becoming Belgian as well.

So I participated in the workshop that Feral festival hosted in September 2024.

Under the big tent, there are about ten of us. Some are ashamed of their nationality because they come from an imperialist country. The differences between our backgrounds, certain emergency situations, and certain privileges soon surface.

Anyuta serves us waffles and more waffles, and we gorge on them





continuously, to comfort ourselves. They patch up our cracks.

Anyuta shares their analyses, surprises and disappointments with us, and we gorge ourselves even more.

At times, the sound of aerosol whipped cream being sprayed drowns out their voice.

Questions remain.

How do the other participants experience this intimate moment entrusted to an artist, in the hope of contributing to a future collective good? How can we create a form of reciprocity and a framework of ethical sharing for the creation of the future ceremony, when we know that certain administrative procedures will not succeed even after years, leaving part of the population without papers?

The first quasi-official ceremony will be held in Ostend.

It will take place in the reception room of each of the associated municipality buildings.

The speech, honed by Anyuta, will be read by elected officials.

Fetish accessories are still being gathered.

The most emblematic will be the famous custom-designed waffle maker with a mould that produces messages.

A buffet table will feature gourmet toppings reflecting the variety of cultures present in Belgium. A recipe book of garnishes from around the world will probably be published.

The ceremony will also be repeated elsewhere, and the media will be invited, the idea being to convince the federal government to adopt the ritual.

A bunch of questions are still burning my lips.

Anyuta, do you consider this ceremony to be a performance?

Or is it rather a mutant public-service design?

Is the role of the artist in society seriously switching?

Anyuta laughs. They hadn't really seen themselves as a service designer standing in for the local civil service or the elected electoral body. But now that the subject is on the table, they admit to having studied law before art school and that their previous project was about the institution of marriage.

As an artist, they feel called to bring a little conviviality to our society.

The ceremony will borrow from theatre but also from rites of passage.

There will therefore be an egregore and the waffle communality will allow the aggregation ritual.

On Anyuta's pastry mould is engraved: *Een wafel eet je niet alleen.*

"You don't eat a waffle alone". So I am not alone anymore.

→ [wiazemsky.eu](http://wiazemsky.eu)



# Returning to the Earth to Care for the Margins

Since 2021, the collective Back2SoilBasics has focused its practice on regenerating the earth through knowledge of the mind, soul, and soil. Guided by the power of Nature, the people in this network share tools for permaculture in urban contexts, to make resilience more accessible. At Feral, Ramelle Moupila and T rence Rion proposed that everybody gets involved and makes bread with their own hands, finding a new way of assessing living standards based on the nine fundamental human needs.<sup>1</sup> Some months later we went back to see how they were getting on and to speak with them about their vision of permaculture and their work with local communities.<sup>2</sup>

## EMMANUELLE NIZOU:

**“Could you share how you were involved in the founding of the Back2SoilBasics collective?”**

### RAMELLE MOUPILA:

I co-founded the collective with Anima O. Cassamajor in 2021. Originally, I'm a socio-cultural facilitator, so I organised music, theatre and 'cruzine' (cooking with raw food) workshops for young children. When I was a teenager, I went through some pretty serious emotional shocks that turned my microbiota upside down. That's why I want to teach younger people how to eat better: it's totally possible to treat yourself in a healthy way.

**T RENCE RION:** I've been involved in theatre and music since I was a child. When I moved to Brussels, I started asking myself more and more questions about the state

of the world. I had this desire to take care of where I lived. I enrolled in a permaculture course, and shortly after, in an international teacher training course to teach permaculture to refugees and migrants. It was so instructive! Back2SoilBasics is also an extension of this reflection on the cultural diversity of people and the natural diversity of species.

## EN: What is your approach to permaculture at Back2SoilBasics?

**TR:** Permaculture is a way of interacting with living beings without harming them. It's about growing things sustainably and moving towards states of abundance. It's about 'accompanying' nature at different scales, observing and trying to understand this

1. This concept was developed in the 1990s, notably by economist Manfred Max-Neef. The nine fundamental human needs are subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity, and freedom.
2. See also [Revue Feral n°1 et n°2](#) available on the Cifasothèque.

3. [Korenbeek](#) is a former school site in Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, transformed by various associations – including Toestand and Back2SoilBasics – into a meeting place for the neighbourhood.
4. Disease caused by the proliferation of yeast-like fungi of the *Candida* genus.

consciousness, this intelligence at work. An important principle of permaculture is also to value the margins.

**EN: The relationship with local communities is at the heart of your approach to permaculture: is this your way of taking care of the margins?**

**TR:** At Korenbeek<sup>3</sup>, our initial idea was to remove the concrete, put some soil back in, and restore space for what's essential. That's where the name Back2SoilBasics comes from. Back to the soil, back to what nourishes us in the literal sense.

**RM:** Yes, because the collective is based in a neighbourhood with many buildings and social housing, where people are packed together. When residents come to our space, they come looking for fresh air and something they don't necessarily understand but that they find stimulating. We've just finished building an outdoor bread oven. We organised several workshops to grind grain, mix straw with soil and collect clay from a hole dug in the sand nearby. Some rather surreal conversations arose during this project. Simply having their hands in the soil and feeling connected made the people seem possessed, as if nothing could stop them. Suddenly, everything was alive.

**EN: Who do you offer these workshops to? Children, teenagers?**

**RM:** We find it interesting to leave the space open to all. I grew up in a boarding school and spent most of my life in concrete-built environments. I went into the forest for the first time when I was around 18 or 19 years

old. We spent our time above the buildings, singing and making art, but we weren't in nature because we didn't have access to it. So, at first, we wanted to make Korenbeek an after-school spot. We went into schools, and I offered capoeira and choir activities. Anima offered their workshops on construction and soil awareness. Nowadays, it's mostly the kids from the neighbourhood who come, driven by curiosity.

**EN: What was the workshop you ran during Feral – [Flour Release](#) – about?**

**RM:** It was very simple. I suggested making bread with two different flours (rice and chestnut), which literally saved my life. It took me a long time to realise that today's bread is problematic. I wanted to propose practical alternatives.

**TR:** By simply mixing water and flour, I was surprised to see how deeply we addressed this question of ritual; how much it loosened people's tongues. Making bread brought people together who had never met before. It's the result of a long process: cutting, collecting, and grinding the wheat, making the dough... The bread is the ultimate achievement. But the process quickly connected us to an ancestral and sacred dimension. It gave us the opportunity to talk about intensive farming, raise questions about gluten, discuss digestion, as well as diseases like candidiasis<sup>4</sup> and alternative ways of healing from it. Kneading dough and understanding that we depend on soil, water and fire to stay alive and healthy gave this workshop a dimension we hadn't imagined.

**EN: Was this bread-making workshop a ritual moment, a ritual of care?**

**RM:** Ritual is a form of presence that you decide to settle into. Once you settle yourself into it, you're already in ritual. I'd say it's also about relating to others, doing things together, not necessarily in the same way but with a collective awareness. There's something magical about it. For me, in fact, as soon as it's magic, it's ritual.

**TR:** The beautiful thing is that the words of others often give answers to our own questions. When creating an open meeting space, a paradox seems to appear: people come to make bread, but they also come to do nothing. There's not really an expected outcome. And then, an exploration begins, people start exchanging thoughts and opening up to each other, with all their quirks. Personally, I've developed the habit of taking time to say thank you for the food that is 'given' to me, and to truly acknowledge the hundreds, if not thousands, of people who have worked to make it possible for me to eat this rice. Feeling gratitude and realising that I'm part of a much larger and wiser system than myself. Yes, it's a matter of ritual, a connection to a certain spirituality and verticality.

**EN: How do you invite people to your workshops?**

**RM:** It's never an obligation. When teenagers come to the site, we suggest what we want to set up and what could interest them. If they don't feel like participating on that day, they can come back whenever they feel like it.

**TR:** Yes, it's very organic. We're

into something more horizontal, a bit like rhizome connections. With Back2SoilBasics, we like to apply this natural principle of heterogeneity, of valuing minority groups and taking care of the margins. It's important because it's at the margins that the most adaptive species appear; caught between several environments, they face more constraints and therefore grow stronger. My mixed heritage has taught me the need to embrace several worlds at the same time."



# The Ritual, an Act of Perception and Transformation



Drawing of GAML's pots and pans during the concert held on 13 September 2024 at La Fonderie, Brussels, Feral 2024.

**What is the horizon of thought from which rituals are invented in public space and in the heart of the social fabric? Where does the quest for rituality in artistic practice come from today? What do these things reveal or unveil? How are they performative and transformative for our territories and communities? These were some of the questions addressed by artists, researchers, participants, and listeners in the third edition of Feral. These movements of thought, experimentation, and intimate and collective writing have taken several paths. The following text, which concludes the magazine, is a proposal for a ritual journey through the city and its fringes.**

## **Reconfiguring our sensory experiences**

The mechanical and deterministic Western view of the modern subject has led to a detachment from the sensory. More than an ecological crisis, we are going through a crisis of the sensible towards the living.<sup>1</sup> Exposed to the harmful effects of the Anthropocene, we are experiencing an impoverishment of attention to human and more-than-human life forms. The advent of a disenchanted world where Nature is nothing more than an inanimate resource is one of the central issues for artists seeking to reconfigure sensory experiences.

These practices stem from a more global necessity, that of rethinking the conditions for the habitability of the planet and putting an end to a colonial and globalised model in which human activity is based

1. Estelle Zhong Mengual & Baptiste Morizot, "L'illisibilité du paysage: Enquête sur la crise écologique comme crise de la sensibilité", *Nouvelle revue d'esthétique*, 2018/2.

2. See Mohamed Amer Meziane, "Notes on the Rites of Art", pp 22-25.

3. See The Laboratory of Insurrectional Imagination & Unbewitching Finance, "From activism to animism: becoming the territory and unbewitching the narratives of late capitalism", pp. 54-59.

4. See Anaïs Vaillant, "Experiences of Collective Transformation through Carnival Rituals", pp. 34-38.

on extractivism rather than on the pooling of resources. These artists are earthlings before they are artists, and they're honing their tools to imagine another project of social and planetary construction, sharpening their capacities as much as ours, to bring sensory listening to the world. They offer forms of connection that can establish new ways of building our knowledge and expertise.

Inhabiting the fragments of heritage in this disenchanted world<sup>2</sup> is the horizon of thought from which to invent these practices and formats. This aesthetic awareness is accompanied by the questioning of a tradition in the arts centred on the primacy of vision. The idea is to create from the environments that generate us, to start from the *already-there*. This artistic approach emphasises feeling, seeking to avoid the pitfall of the theatre that reenacts rupture and opposition – what Jay Jordan calls the "separation machine."<sup>3</sup>

### Creating in multispecies assemblies

While this spatial arrangement – the theater as a separation – is a reflection of the Western spectator's gaze, we must of course make some distinctions: many of the proposals avoid end-on confrontation and engage the body and the senses in a holistic experience. Moreover, most performing artists do not forget the context in which their concerns are rooted. They balance research and performance time: the creation is accompanied by collective reflexive devices involving thinkers, embodied knowledge that has enabled the articulation of the creation, and spectators. If they do not always choose to develop their projects *in situ*, their

situated and engaged practices place them at the heart of the public sphere.

In this paradigm shift, we are witnessing a shift in the role of artists. Drawing inspiration from the social sciences and from their field work, they become directly involved in societal issues. As parts of a globalised arrangement, they create situations that establish a network of active connections with their urban, architectural, social, human, and more-than-human environment.

### Recreating the link

It is in the fight against this detachment from the sensory world, which we call the extinction of experience<sup>4</sup>, that we see artists in searching for an aesthetic renewal that forms an alliance between knowledge and the sensible, through the practice of ritual in art. Rituals are not the only answer to the desire to bring together what has been separated, to reconnect with what has been severed, but they assert themselves as a way of recreating bonds. For they make perceptible this fabric of human and other interdependencies in which the threads of our existence develop. Jay Jordan and Isa Frémeaux refer to it as an "ancient biotechnology for weaving bonds": one of the functions of which is to create community and forge links with a territory.

Anaïs Vaillant tells us that as an ethnographer she travels "through invisible or at least unthought – or unthinkable – worlds at the heart of the modern West, worlds where communities are consciously in search of a rituality that is lacking in its full version: connection between human beings and connection with other entities. Worlds where experiential practices respond to the need



5. See in particular: Alphonse Eklou Uwantege, "How I Talk to my Dead", pp. 12-13; "Who Can Change Carnival?", pp. 28-33; Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi / craziniST artist, "Performance as an Act of Radical Resistance", pp. 45-47.

6. Myriam Bahaffou, "Réformer, refonder, réhabiliter? La religion-spiritualité comme renouvellement écoféministe",

Preface in: Yuna Visentin, *Spiritualités radicales, Rites et traditions pour réparer le monde*, Divergences, 2024.

7. Pascal Lardellier, *Éloge de ce qui nous lie. L'étonnante modernité des rites*, L'Aube, 2023. The term "egregore" refers to a non-physical entity or thoughtform that arises from the collective thoughts and emotions of a distinct group of individual.

for a bodily and collective experience of transformation, both transcendent and immanent". These practices, which definitively break with the myth of a creative genius *ex nihilo*, seek to restore depth and density to the experience. This experience is that of the relationships we have with the places to which we are fundamentally attached, in order to participate in the renewal of the vital force and the regeneration of the communities that live there. They are looking for that sense of connection that's sometimes called "(re)connection to the invisible".

### **Invisible, invisibles, invisibilised**

It is in response to the extent of a conceptual void that the question of the "invisible" arises. As a place of passage and the crossing of thresholds, the ritual is intrinsically linked to the invisible because it allows access. For lack of words or the ability to think about what still eludes us, the "invisible" encompasses multiple realities: it is what capitalist materialism has cut us off from; it embraces forms of immanence and animism, bringing us closer to these "more-than-human entities". Through celebration, transe, and altered states of consciousness, ritual allows us to explore the sacred and the spiritual, those transcendental experiences lacking in those who have distanced themselves from or rejected their religious heritage.

Pluralised, the invisible is also a way of involving those who suffer from the systems of domination that patriarchal and colonial techno-capitalism has engendered. The "invisibles" are part of a system of norms that has marginalised them. These denied bodies, forgotten, erased from history, dead without honour or burial, these unwanted bodies ousted from the

public space, suffer processes of discrimination and erasure<sup>5</sup>. The philosopher and ecofeminist activist Myriam Bahaffou argues that "the revaluation of links to ancestors, to a territory, to a group, the feeling of belonging, collective emotional (even transcendent) experiences [are] at the heart of any struggle for the abolition of systems of domination."<sup>6</sup> Ritual is said to reverse the power relations between a dominant and legitimising tradition and popular or non-legitimate cultures.

### **Imagining our future rituals**

Performative and political artistic acts stem from this quest for rituality. Ritual is a tool of action for the invisibles, those who are subject to forms of cultural hegemony that undermine their capacity for subjectivation. Testifying to a need for the common, it summons an *egregore*<sup>7</sup> to open the door to other collective futures. Ritual is a power to act and it is transformative in the sense that it helps to prefigure possible and desirable worlds. These Feral encounters have allowed us to imagine what rituals and relationships with the invisibles can do to empower us and contribute to building radically egalitarian relations: looking after the conditions that make social justice and joy possible.

# Bios

**Mohamed Amer Meziane** (FR/US) is a philosopher and historian now teaching French and Middle East Studies at Brown University, after teaching for four years at Columbia University. He is the author of *The States of the Earth. An Ecological and Racial History of Secularization*. His second book is titled *At the Edge of the Worlds. Towards a Metaphysical Anthropology*.

**Back2SoilBasics** (BE) is a network of people guided by the power of mother nature. Their practice is based around earth regeneration through mind, soul and soil knowledge. They share basic tools for permaculture in an urban context as a resilient practice made accessible. They focus on people of colour, local communities or people with less access to nature.

**Le Carnaval Sauvage** (BE) is organised in Brussels since 2012 by an open, horizontal collective. It's a young carnival that celebrates the end of winter as much as it does point out the processes of gentrification. It aims to reinvent a tradition that reflects something of the lives of those who make it happen, and to develop other figures of otherness. After judging the property developer and the bureaucracy, the procession sets off through the working-class districts of Brussels. Off the beaten track, but not out of touch with social concerns.

**La Consœurie des Connasses** (BE) is the result of CHARIVARI, a shared art project led by Sara Selma Dolorès and Bastien Poncelet. Since 2020, they have been running workshops at Central (La Louvière cultural centre) combining the carnival spirit with queer culture, to question the

hetero-patriarchal heritage of this folk tradition. Participants dance, sing, wear make-up and create costumes. La Consœurie des Connasses and its Gilette - a re-appropriation of the Gilles folk figure - was born at the Soumonce Carnival in La Louvière in 2023.

**Désorceler la finance [Unbewitch Finance]** (BE) is a wild, independent and self-managed laboratory. This transdisciplinary space brings together artists, researchers and activists. It activates witchcraft practices as tools of anti-capitalist struggle. They use the tools of magic to unravel late capitalism's fiction and imagine its alternatives. Their practice combines rituals to remove the spell of finance, cartomancies to reopen horizons, exhibitions of economic curiosities, speculative practices, documentary and sound creations...

**Anna Czapski** (BE/FR) makes aesthetic work in the real world, with walking documentary and futurology. She creates experiments, writes poetry and looks for other possible ways of living. For her, it's all the same.

**Alphonse Eklou Uwantege** (BE) is a 28-year-old queer Sagittarius born in Minsk to a Rwandan and Togolese couple. They are a model, performer and director. Their body is their tool, writing their weapon of resurrection, performance a political emergency. Their method is based on a desire to elude the norms of representation. Their work questions the relation between the performer and spectator by disrupting the space of the stage.

**Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi** (GH), aka **crazinisT artisT** is a multidisciplinary

artist, curator and mentor from Ghana. She works with performance and installation to investigate gender stereotypes, prejudices, queerness, identity politics and conflicts, sexual stigma and their consequences for marginalised people. With rituals and a gender-fluid persona, she employs her own body as a thought-provoking tool confronting issues such as disenfranchisement, injustice, violence, objectification, anti-blackness and systemic indoctrination.

Since the end of 2017, **GAML** (BE) has been hijacking saucepans salvaged from the flea market on Place du Jeu de Balle in Brussels to turn them into instruments. Behind this everyday object lies real melodic potential reminiscent of traditional Balinese bronze instruments. GAML performs indoors and outdoors, acoustically and in the middle of the audience, offering a unique musical experience.

**Élie Guillou** (FR) is a writer, musician and funeral officiant. His current research focuses on secular funeral ritual: as an officiant helping the bereaved prepare and conducting funerals; as part of the *Chant Funérailles* collective, providing music at ceremonies and exploring the place of music in ritual; and through the writing of a book, a melting pot of experiences and thoughts.

### **Inter-Environnement**

**Bruxelles** (BE) is an association uniting residents in the Brussels region around urban, ecological and social issues. IEB is also open to the emergence of new or more ephemeral dynamics, as well as to people active in local struggles, developing situated

expertise, as long as they are part of a collective dynamic.

### **Laboratoire d'Imagination Insurrectionnelle [The Laboratory of Insurrectional Imagination]** (FR)

is a collective bringing together artists and activists to devise new forms of creative resistance. It has launched a regatta of rebel rafts to block a coal-fired power station, transformed hundreds of bicycles into disobedient machines and refused to be censored by the Tate Modern.

**Maryne Lanaro** (FR) is a space dramaturg, director and performer. Her current research focuses on secular funeral rituals and narratives around the concept of “end” (intimate or environmental). With Grand Dehors collective, she creates works in public space around the notions of commons and rituals. She is a funeral officiant and works with the research team STEEP at INRIA on narratives surrounding the Collapse, as well as with the Coopérative Funéraire de Rennes on designing new rituals.

**Stacy Makishi** (UK) is a transplant from Hawaii. Like a bonsai plant, Stacy is small but old. She has been making art for over 40 years. A cross-fertilization of live art, theatre, comedy, film and visual art, her work is as complex as it is accessible; humorous as it is challenging; visual as it is literate. Makishi believes in art's transformative power and strives to share her creative process with others to put more “aloha” into the world.

**Nolwenn Peterschmitt** (FR) was born in Strasbourg. With Laurène Fardeau she co-directs the Marseille collective Groupe Crisis. Formally

trained as a performer at the Académie de l'Union in Limoges, she continues her investigation of the stage through encounters with butoh, krump, contemporary dance, clowning, and research in social sciences. Her artistic practice constantly shifts between exploring actor's play, raw embodiment, and dance as manifested desire.

**Anaïs Vaillant** (FR) is an anthropologist and a street, stage and radio artist. She works on traditions, appropriations and cultural inventions in popular festive events in France, Brazil and elsewhere. She is a member of Collectif Anonyme du Carnaval Ambulant, an informal, activist group which, since 2009, has been committed to instilling a contemporary carnival dynamic in different social milieus and bringing together "traditional" and "autonomous" carnivals.

**La Voix des Sans-papiers** (BE) In 2012, the march of undocumented migrants travelled through several European countries, including Belgium, demanding freedom of movement and settlement for all migrants. In 2014, a new march of migrants crossed Europe from Berlin to Marseille under the name of the European Migrants Caravan. In June 2014, it stopped off in Brussels, where a number of undocumented migrants decided to form a collective: La Voix des Sans-Papiers Bruxelles (VSP). Since 2014, numerous actions and activities in the buildings occupied by VSP have enabled the collective to organise its members, despite police and administrative violence.

**Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert** (RU/BE) is a multidisciplinary artist

working in the visual arts, theater, and participatory art sphere. Their works revolve around the theme of intimacy, exploring it from various angles by delving deep into their own psyche, sharing personal experiences until they no longer feel intimate, or creating a sense of intimacy within the works themselves. Anyuta works alongside their life partner, Kim Snauwaert, under the name BETWEEN US.

**Emmanuelle Nizou** (BE) works with artists and collectives who invent strategies for intervening in the public sphere, at the crossroads between art and activism, reflecting on the place of commons. She is also a member of Désorceler la finance [Unbewitch Finance].

**Murielle Lô** (BE) draws. Armed with her iPad, she likes to walk around the events dear to her heart, immortalising fragments of an always-changing world.

**Lucie Caouder** (BE) is a graphic designer mainly working on editorial design. Her designs always intend to be straightforward and accessible without shying away from experimentation and care.





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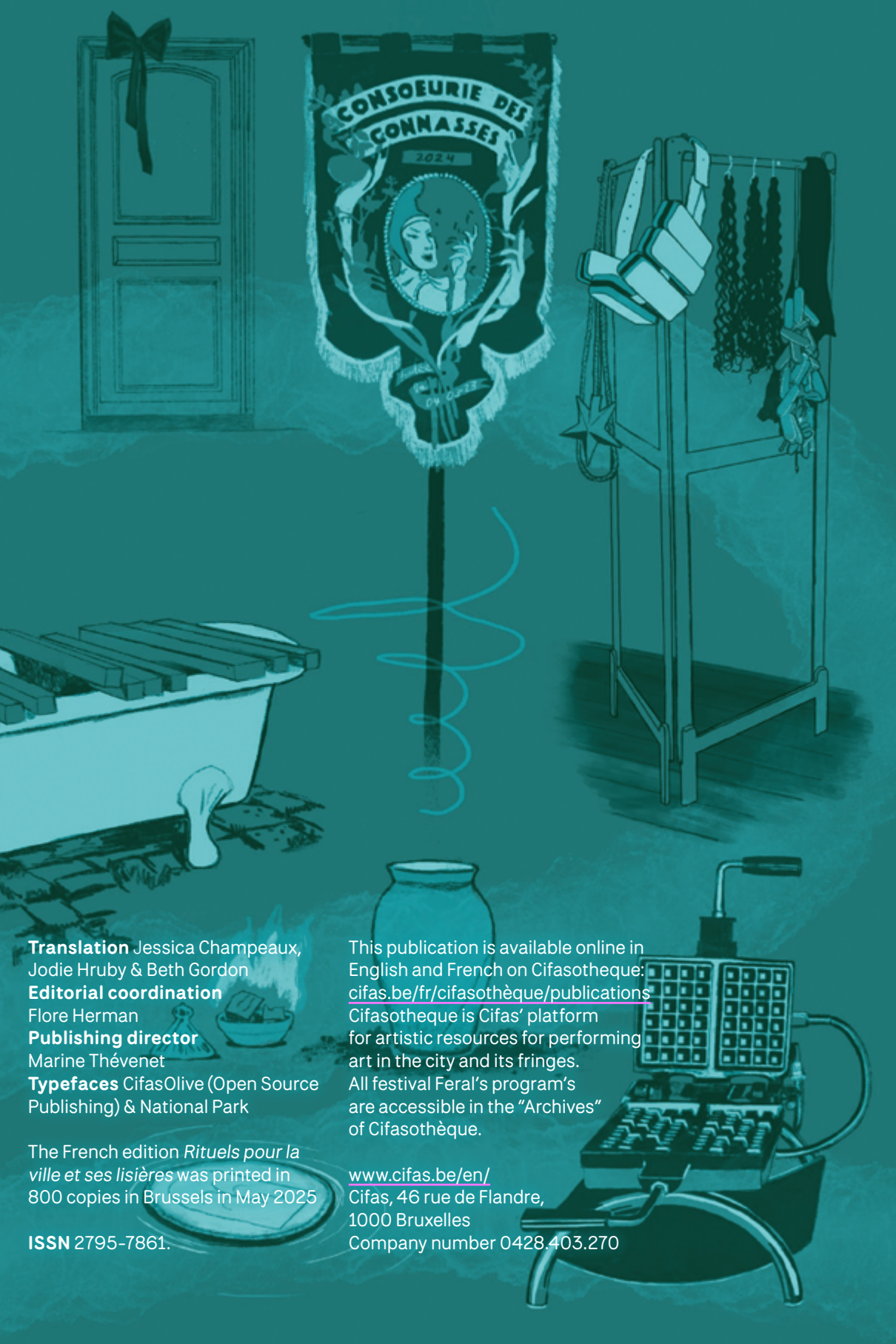
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Intimate rituals, collective healing forces, urban (anti) speculation or the reappropriation of Carnival traditions: all of these dance, think, and transform our relationship with public space. Why are rituals becoming increasingly important in the performing arts today?

Feral Magazine was initiated by Cifas as a continuation of the annual Feral festival, with the aim of sharing ideas and practices at the intersection of performing arts and public space.

Cifas is a place of learning and experimentation for performing arts in the city and its fringes.

**Alphonse Eklou Uwantege, Anaïs Vaillant, Anna Czapski, Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert, Back2SoilBasics, Carnaval Sauvage, craziniST artistT, Désorceler la finance, Élie Guillou / La Coopérative funéraire de Rennes, Emmanuelle Nizou, Inter-Environnement Bruxelles, Laboratoire d'Imagination Insurrectionnelle & the participants of the workshop *Désobéissance Magick*, La Consœurie des Connasses, La Voix des Sans-Papiers, Maryne Lanaro, Mohamed Amer Meziane, Nolwenn Peterschmitt, Stacy Makishi.**



Feral refers to an animal or a plant having reverted to a wild state.

**Cifas**