



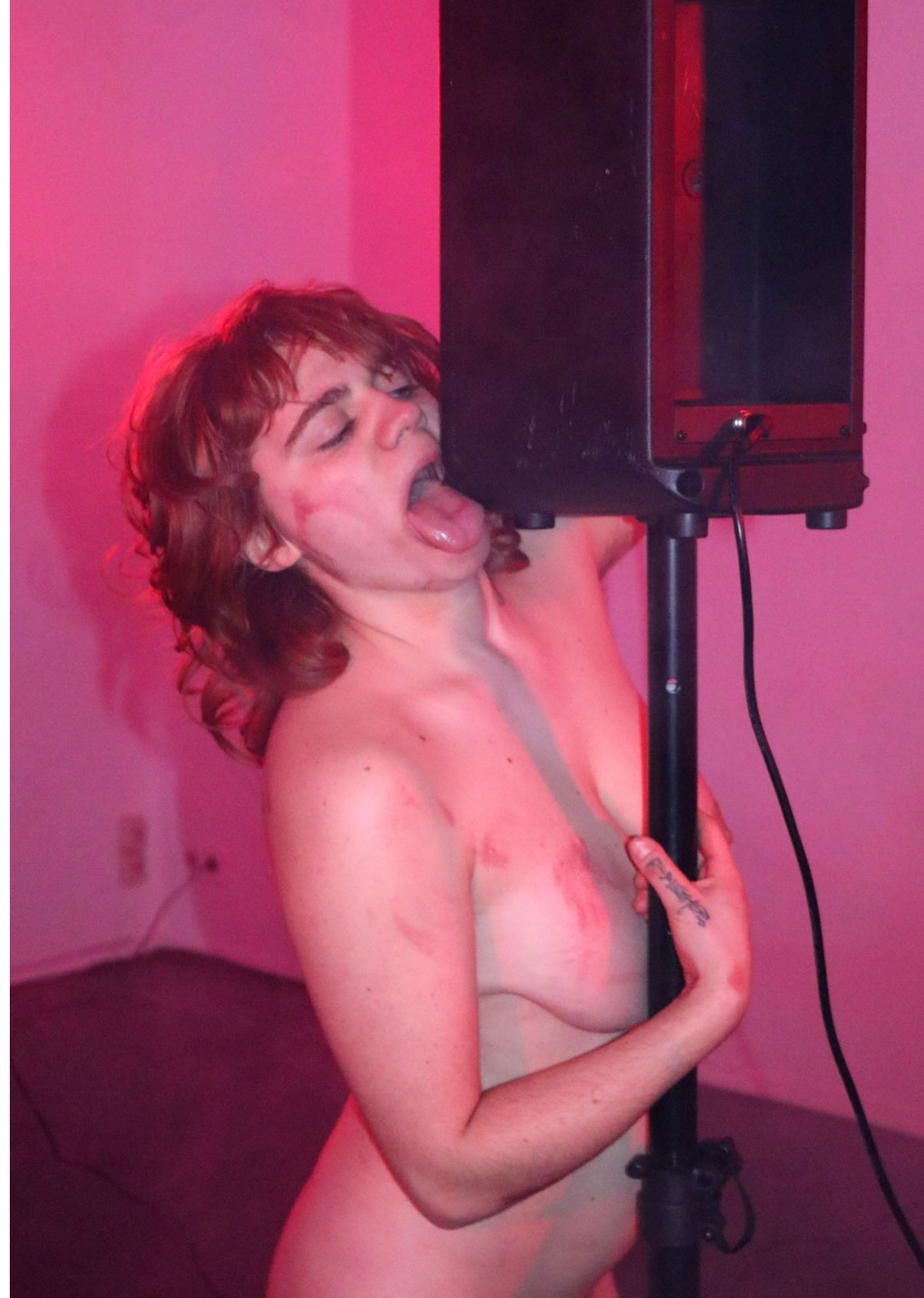
GALLERYFOR DANCE AND PERFORMANCE

#9

NEW FEARS is a gallery for dance, performance and transdisciplinary working, representing Berlin-based and international artists. For each episode NEW FEARS invites 2 artists for a residency, which leads to a public event. The process is accompanied by a writer, whose output together with a visual documentation manifests in a publication.

NEW FEARS #9 invited Kulshedra who shared an evening with the improvisation format FIGHT CLUB. Further Jenny James was invited who collaborated with several artists on an immersive project bringing together performance and clubculture, which was documented and written about by Silvio Saraceno.

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K. was standing in the middle of the room, their body pulsating with the music and their hair blowing in artificial wind, as they issued a challenge: «defeat me».¹

Not because they wanted to show weakness or either assert power, but because they wanted to surrender to the energy of the sound and the hunger of the crowd, and to be affected by the humanity of things. If that meant being defeated, then so be it. We all do it when we feel safe. But under the spotlight, defeat revealed ego in all its vulnerability and, in doing so, also declared a collective desire to embrace our true selves.

As the music got louder, K. got undressed and started making love with the sound system. A lipstick came out of their pussy.

“Elites can kiss my ass” is what they wrote on the mirror that reflected the naked body, before their gesture became so violent that it appeared indecipherable to others.

The message, however, was clear: being vulnerable is a powerful tool to burn down the same old patterns of hierarchies and fuck with the imposed norms. It was an invitation to be oblique lines against the straight, vertical orientations of society.²

That is how the battle began. People started to follow K.’s example, one by one entering the ring, performing on their own, then competing with others, and so on. But there was no hunter or hunted. Blood did not stain their hands, instead sweat and spit covered their skin. More people joined in, turning it into a communal, consensual dance; a *fight club* where each individual had the chance to fully expose themselves, without restricting one another’s freedom.³ The encounter of their bodies was going beyond symbiotic connection and shaping into the metaphysical.

O. was standing at the top of the stairs, his body wrapped in a white veil and his hair soaked in artificial mist, as he shouted: «Here! Settled! Absolutely!».⁴

Not because he wanted to break up the fight, but because he wanted to say something important – perhaps the announcement to a party or the wisdom of life – and the noise of tinsel cascades that adorned the stairwell was drowning out his words.

I guess it is also what happened to Peeperkorn in *The Magic Mountain* when, leading a group of patients on a hike to a waterfall, he had to deal with the thundering wild waters.

Palms turned towards them and a wine cup in hand, O. managed to captivate the crowd and gather everyone’s attention. He attempted to communicate using the speech apparatus, his facial expressions, his body language, but no one was able to understand what the hell he was trying to say.

The message, however, was clear: in order to reach what everyone was breathlessly seeking, they had to take the risk of crossing the waterfalls. Thus, people let O. guide them on a hike through the stairway. The steps led to a casino.

That is how the party began. Amidst a surreal atmosphere permeated by the sound of slot machines, creatures of all shapes were lounging on billiard tables, playing games and tunes of their own. But there were no winners and no losers. Unlike other casinos, this was more than just a place to gamble. It was a space where the rules of determinism, or society, did not apply; a place in which people could be free to experiment and feel part of something bigger. Something that could be considered of a heterotopian character, an “other space” where utopia is actually achieved.⁵

I. was standing in the middle of the crowd, lost in thought. I. remembered about childhood dreams of a never-ending carnival, in which she could have always been allowed not to hide and to manifest without fear of inadequacy. But as I. looked around, I. realized that such a dream was not necessary anymore.



1. *Defeat Me* is the name of the performance presented by Kulshedra during the first chapter of New Fears #9 event and unfolds to the notes of music made by Antuantu.

The performer explores themes such as the body, lust and humanity, using dance as a mean of catharsis and the sound system as an object of their own desire.

«I use objects that we all know, and I used them as my desires wish. I make love grinding to the sound system, I blow wind on myself as the music gets higher and louder. I see myself in the mirror and my flesh is not sexualized, I find freedom and peace to be in my ego. Ego as wholesome and not only negative trades as we've been taught to know. The dance and the moves are the ones that I carry when I rave, when I'm by myself, when I'm with friends. I vibe, I ride. Not too much and not too safe. I brought them under a performatic light. A moment of myself with the others.»

Kulshedra's moves are strong, sexy, alternated with subtle ethereal moments, and challenge the audience to defeat them in a metaphysical sense. It is a moment of sharing of vulnerability, that empowers both the performer and the others to destroy hierarchical patterns and oppressive societal norms through embracing their true self-expression.

2. In the article *Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology*, feminist writer and scholar Sara Ahmed argues that bodies and objects shape their own form through being oriented towards each other, an orientation that can be experienced as the cohabitation or sharing of space. The lines that direct them, defined as lines of thought as well as of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition. Bodies that tend towards straight objects become straight themselves, acquiring their tendencies. However, while orientations direct, they also keep open the possibility of changing direction and finding alternative paths, where deviation offers hope.





There are, in fact, non-normative contexts characterized by deviant, oblique bodies and objects that refuse to stay in line and that, after experiencing pressure, give rise to breaking points. Refusing inheritance, or hierarchies, opens up other ways of inhabiting space, time, and forms of social encounter. It is possible to consider “queer” the reality that takes shape from the contact between those bodies and objects that lean outside the straight line traditionally designated by family, society, and institutions in general; a reality that is outside of any institution, constituted by a large non-consanguineous family and, in this case, artistic practices that are not often recognized. The twist that underlies it is a necessary action in order to create new textures on the ground.

3. The *Fight Club* is a dynamic improvisational performance format that was invented by July in a former fight club and was presented for the first time in about 10 years during New Fears #9 part 1. Following Kulshedra’s *Defeat Me*, audience members were given a chance to apply and their names were randomly selected in order to determine a lineup. Each performer had three minutes to improvise, including one minute to perform with the previous person, one of solo performance, and one of duet with the next person. The fighters who joined the ring were (in order of appearance): Minu, Steph, Rocio, Rio, Thomas, Luka P., Isabell, Anna, Tim, July, Sophie, Shedra, Karol, Lea, Franzi, Findus, Stuart. Everybody was able to seamlessly synchronize with each other, displaying a diverse range of performances that were at times theatrical, sensual, or just insane. The whole act was accompanied by improvised live music by Rocio, Thomas, Mei, Moss, Jose, Roy and Genesis.

4. „Here! Settled! Absolutely!” are the only words that performer Oskar Pawełko pronounced in his *Untitled* monodram during the second chapter of *New Fears #9 (BABYLEXP)*, that took place inside of a casino in Leipzigerstrasse. As Master of Ceremonies, the performer gathered the audience in the entrance hall with a captivating display of non-verbal communication, choreographic and improvisational elements, as well as involving people’s participation. At the end, with just three words, the audience was guided upstairs and introduced to the main event.

These are also the words shouted by the character of Mynheer Peeperkorn from Thomas Mann’s novel *The Magic Mountain* while leading a group of patients on a hike to a waterfall, which explicitly inspired the piece.

The opening ceremony was followed by performances by Nora Aaron Scherer, Camila Malenchini x Marga Alfeirão, Isu Mignon Mignonne; live musical acts by Bully Fae Collins, Cunt Remember x Hitandrunmom, Itachi and Je Pegge; djsets by Artwife, Dj Rakita, Nadia Wise, Pleasure Politics. The space also hosted artworks by Robin Leveroos, L’Enfant and Wro. The event was directed by James Ames.







5. As Michel Foucault argued in the 1967 lecture *Of Other Spaces*, a particular kind of social space takes shape in every culture and society, which he calls heterotopia.

Unlike utopias, heterotopias are conceived as tangible places with utopian character that are linked to all other spaces by a set of relations, yet suspend, neutralize or reverse the set of relations that those same spaces designate, reflect or mirror. Their function is, in effect, to create an illusory space that denounces the supposed reality outside it as more illusory, but also to create perfected, better organized and constructed compensatory spaces. In addition to having their own rules of behavior and norms of practice, heterotopias usually have their own different spatial and temporal organization - a kind of absolute break with traditional time - and the power to juxtapose different domains that would otherwise be incompatible. The dislocation effect produced becomes functional for a reading of reality on several non-overlapping planes, precisely in the name of another reading of them. Due to their peculiarities, the heterotopias found within a society can disclose a subversive potential: they are able to overthrow the established order, counteract uniformity, subvert language and signification, and reflect the inverted or reversed sides of society. These spaces, which are reserved for the other, the abnormal or the deviant, constitute, in this way, an exception to uniformity and homogeneity. What is not institutionally recognized outside can, therefore, be enacted within them. When applied to the artistic field, heterotopias constitute a useful tool for examining the function of alternative art spaces in relation to institutional ones. Thus, we can consider alternative cultural spaces as “other spaces”, linked to the external system by a set of relationships, but, at the same time, functioning outside the predominant system through a different set of practices and rituals that take place there.





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