



#7

Stalemate by Evgeny Borisenko

Can you wait for me?

I can. You'll be gone for how long?

I don't know. But you'll have enough time to finish the game.

Which game?

Ten people have gathered in a hotel lobby. Their eyes are closed, and their fingertips are fluttering in the air like tendrils of some exotic plant. The heat is intense - minuscule drops of sweat ooze through their skin at each breath, and the blood starts throbbing in the vessels netting their brain and organs.

Pink neon lights are brooming the room, and the crisp sunlight is peering through the half-closed shutters and mingling with the cigarette smoke and occasional incense fumes. The room is vast and still. But its stillness is heavy, as if something unspeakable and grand had just happened, and everyone froze to keep the scene intact. A rectangular glass fountain in its centre is flanked by a white self-playing piano and a series of unpaired metal coffee tables, each decorated by an intricate ensemble of glasses, empty photoframes and abstract statuettes. The smoke rising from the boiling water that fills the fountain is warmed by mauve and amber ceiling lights. Nothing seems deliberate in this lobby, it feels as if someone has started rearranging the already unwelcoming room and left it unfinished. Distant metallic sounds are heard from the distance, and dull amplified whispers fill the lobby.



Henry tends his arm to an unrealistically big cognac glass. The glass is filled with oily blue liquid. He keeps staring at Ajla, who sits, legs crossed, on the opposite side of the coffee table. Ajla firmly grips a metal ink pen. They fervently look at each other. Henry opens his mouth and his teeth fall out from his dried gums onto the metal coffee table, one by one. Tic! Toc! Tac! The clinking sound arrests all the movements in the room, people freeze in a tingling anticipation. Ajla opens the pen, pours the ink into the glass and puts Henry's teeth into it, one by one. Plop, plop. Henry feels a strong pain in his guts. When he falls in love he loses his teeth, and when he loses hope, he's seized with cramps. Ajla stands up and comes closer to Henry. She puts her hands around his waist and enfolds him dearly. Henry closes his eyes and presses his lips warmly to hers in an ardent osculation.





Why do people play? – thinks Alias whilst dipping his feet into the pink water of the fountain. The self-playing piano is slamming Billy Joel’s ‘Piano Man’, an odd choice for such a heavy and soft morning, he thinks. As the hot water is softening his skin he watches people playing chess. Their foreheads are relaxed, movements carefully choreographed: hands hover above the board before snatching a pawn or a rook, chess pieces advance or retreat with untroubled serenity. A couple of sophisticated spectators watch expertly, their frowns failing to disguise their disturbing sense of entitlement. Alias remembers his father desperately trying to teach him chess before abandoning after having seen his son use chess pieces to crack nuts. In chess you either win or lose, you should anticipate, attack, display resilience, cover up your anger and fake smiles in the end. Everything Alias hates. He is quickly reminded of the fact that this train of thought might lead him to dangerous levels of haughtiness (in the end some of the chess players are his friends), and decides to indulge himself instead to a plunge in the soft waters of the fountain. When his head is below water, he opens his eyes: the pink waters have no boundaries, and he cannot discern the fountain base, nor its rims. Silky liquid strokes his skin, gentle and distant echos of indistinct chatter lull his ears and he hardly makes any effort to stay afloat. His thoughts slow down, and he falls asleep.

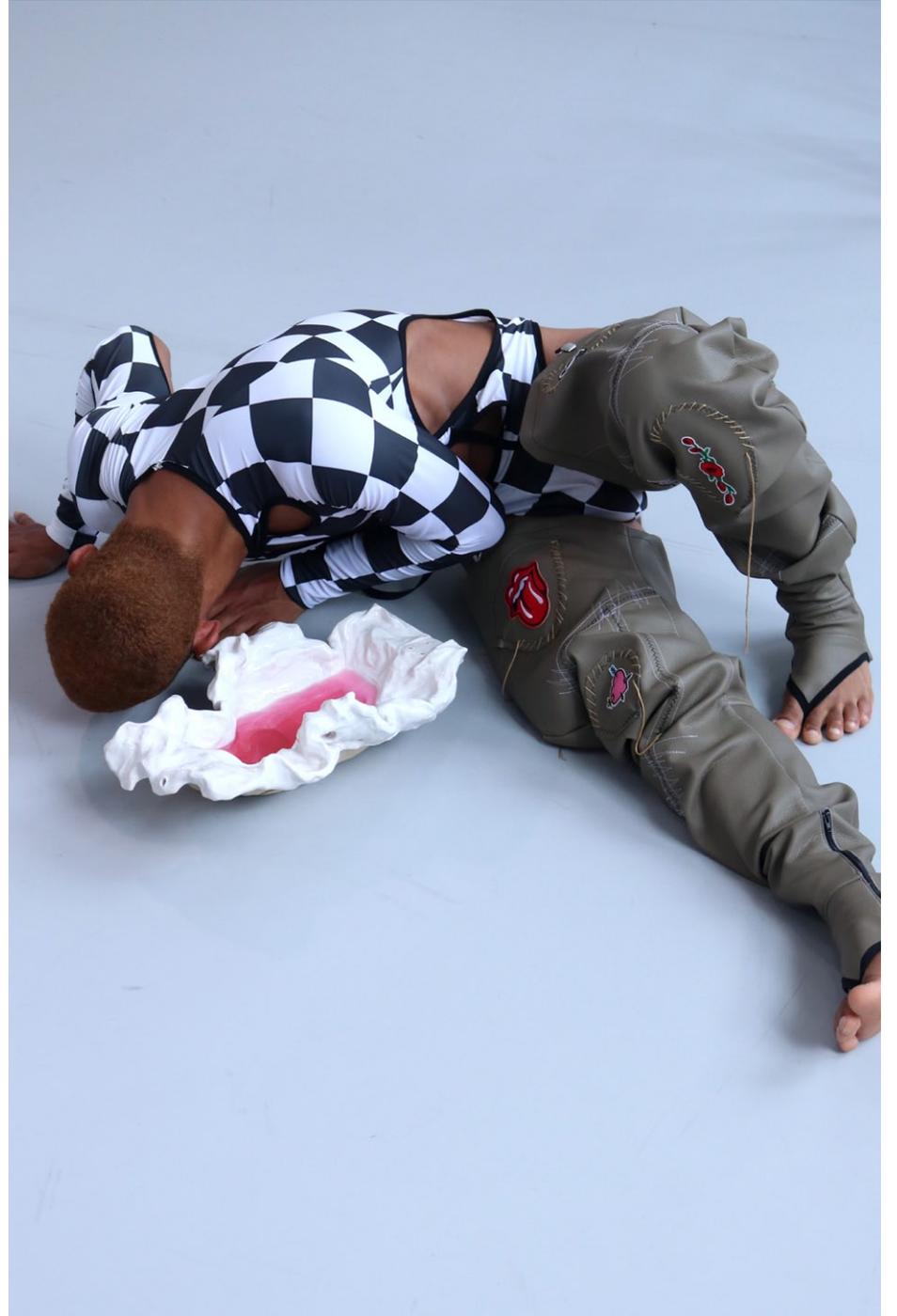




May stands in front of the mirror wearing a pensive mask. She sees limp bodies lying around the chess table, their blank faces; she hears rhythmical clacking of chess pieces against the board. She feels sick, as if there was a bowling ball in her stomach, she is sick of the likeability of the people around her, she is sick of not having the courage to be an absolute nobody. Her left forearm is severely burnt, and the pain is blinding and white. She presses her right thumb against the bandage to release more pain and shutter her senses. As her burning nerve endings send roaring alarm sounds into her brain, her lips start moving effortlessly, and words begin falling from her lips:

эта улица переломана вся ранена
принесите ей бинтов захватите фотокамеру
тут все как крамеры против крамеров
тут все как волки с линялой шерстью
а кто б обнял бедняжку! кто б прижал её к небу!
покажите ей свой эмалевый перстень
покажите камешек из будто-богемского стекла
где внутри пылинки золота и всплески какого-то синего
она поднимется и вздохнёт
она смертельно ранена - перебита разделительной линией
сожжена асфальтоукладчиком дотла

The value assigned to a chess piece attempts to represent its potential strength in the game. While the standard valuation (one point for a pawn, three points for a knight or bishop, five points for a rook, and nine points for a queen) is generally reliable, the relative values of the pieces change as the game develops. In specific circumstances, the values may be quite different: sometimes a knight can be more valuable than a queen if a particular angle is required for a mating attack. Thus, the humble pawn becomes more and more valuable the closer it gets to securing a queen promotion.



A woman stands up and quietly tiptoes to the door left ajar. Her hair is blown by a sudden gust of wind. She stops as if wanting to look backwards. She knows that as soon as she leaves the lobby, it will cease to exist and collapse into itself. She is used to abandoning lovers, friends, pets, plants, empty pots of yoghurt on her father's barn's windowsill, memories of good, memories of bad, leaving behind countries and bus-stops, full ashtrays and empty hearts. She can easily transform her memory into nothingness, and people she was with for just a moment into a dirty pile of starpowder. Her hair remembers all the times when she dramatically turned away from the others, leaving them with a curious flurry of scents and a sense of indignation. She will now do as she always used to because she has nothing to lose, and she knows oh so well that when someone dies, a butterfly is born in someone else's stomach, and when blood appears on a fingertip, a new virus is discovered in the Arctic snow. She will now make a few more steps, and this ridiculously decorated hotel lobby filled with slumbry people will implode. Sheer delight and no regrets. A regret is like a piercing: even when it disappears, the body remembers its hole and its metallic presence, - and this is why she has always refused to have one. Radiant darkness is now welcomingly staring at her from across the doorstep. She resists the last temptation to turn on her heels, and moves forward.







NEW FEARS is a gallery for dance, performance and transdisciplinarity, 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 #7 invited the artists Don Aretino and Julian Weber, who worked together with the performers Ronald Berger, Han Tse, Lie Ning und Anna von Räden. Text by Evgeny Borisenko and photographs by Julian Weber.

<https://www.newfears.net/>

Supported by DIEHL+RITTER/TANZPAKT RECONNECT, which is funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media as part of the NEUSTART KULTUR initiative.

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