

Draft version of “Choreographic Gestures of Resurgence and Repair: Arkadi Zaidés’s research-based performance project: *Necropolis*”.
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**Choreographic Gestures of Resurgence and Repair:
Arkadi Zaidés’s research-based performance project Necropolis
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With the Institut des Croisements^[1], choreographer, dancer and curator Arkadi Zaidés^[2] unfolds a continuing engagement in human rights issues. In his art practice, he consequently thinks through the entanglement of politics and the ways bodies (are allowed to) move. Whereas in dance studies, choreography is usually defined as the arrangement of bodily movement in time and space, Zaidés primarily considers choreography as (arranged) patterns of movement across the world’s stage. His dance performance projects are hence an ongoing journey in tracing and thinking through these patterns of movement: How is/are the movement(s) of people geared along national boundaries, along notions of citizenship and statelessness? How are bodies allowed to (be) move(d) in territory wars, or during religious and political occupation? What is the choreographic pattern of social (im)mobility in global migration, also in the context of environmental displacement and ecological grief? Linking bodily movement with dance and politics, Zaidés intersects art and activism throughout his choreographic practice.

His latest performance, Necropolis, considers the ‘movements of people who are systematically and brutally stopped by border policies’ (Zaidés in Noeth 2020: 51). The starting point of every performance is extensive research into local cases of deaths of migrants. An important aspect of Necropolis lies in the choreographic gestures of care for these dead, performed by everything and everyone involved in the research-based performance and the long-durational performance project. There is the deep-mapping by Arkadi Zaidés, extracting the migrants’ names from beneath the earth’s surface – or rather their stories resurging from the underworld; the commemoration rituals by the grave-location searchers, remembering forgotten bodies – or rather their bodies haunting our mind; and Arkadi Zaidés and Emma

Gioia performing a forensic danse macabre with Moran Senderovich's sculpture, reanimating the scattered remains – or rather the body parts recomposing their movements in the heterotopia of Necropolis – the imagined city of the dead. I consider these choreographic gestures as human-bound and more-than-human-bound. Thinking the entanglement of human and nonhuman matter in Necropolis opens up a new perspective on what 'dead' things evoke, allowing missing bodies, dead bodies, body parts and the mass of decomposed bodies to matter. After all, posthuman theory has challenged and rearticulated what the human is -- how it moves and how it becomes-with matter -- in performance studies too.¹

In this contribution, I trace the critical, reparative and resurgent potential of these choreographic gestures of care for and with the dead. The critical departure of Necropolis lies in unsettling the claim to objectivity in map making, on a perceptual as well as a political level. While extracting the origin and the ancestry of the deceased refugees and migrants from beneath the seemingly flat surface of the earth, a vexed, storeyed place surfaces from beneath the smooth surface. In the storeyed or multilayered places laid bare, the migrants' individual stories resurge. A vexed, storeyed place hence becomes a storied place. With the notion of resurgence, I expand the notion of repairing to agency of 'dead' material. In my view, the verb 'to repair' suggests an all-too-human-centred action. I borrow the concept 'resurgence' from anthropologist Anna Tsing (2015: 179--192) who describes 'persistent resurgence' as 'regeneration' (2015: 179).

The choreographic gestures of resurgence and repair in Necropolis are of particular value in the scorched, parched, drowned and infected landscape we currently inhabit. In her New Materialist rendering of Tsing's concept of resurgence, Donna Haraway values art for its 'practices for resurgence' (2016: 82), and its 'speaking resurgence to despair ... in the face of extermination' (2016: 71, 76). The critical departure of Necropolis also lies in confronting fatalism as well as naïve

¹ We have entered a posthuman era, an assertion shared by an increasing number of thinkers such as N. Katherine Hayles, Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, Richard Grusin, and Bernard Stiegler. The performing arts have reacted to these developments by increasingly opening up their traditionally 'human' domain to non-human others. See also *Performance and Posthumanism*, edited by Christel Stalpaert, Kristof van Baarle and Laura Karreman. This edited volume brings together scholars and artists to explore the posthumanist condition in relation to the performing arts.

optimism. In a concluding part, I consider the role of the spectator in this 'form of jointly dealing with questions of responsibility' (Noeth 2020: 51) and wonder how the heterotopia of Necropolis, this city of the dead, acts upon us while haunting us.

Deep-mapping as a navigational choreography with Google Earth

During the first half of the performance Necropolis, Arkadi Zaides and his research assistant Emma Gioia take their places on a chair, with their back to the audience, their faces turned towards a computer screen that is in turn facing us. On the computer screen, a 3D representation of Europe is rendered and simultaneously projected on a big screen at the back wall of the performance space. The 3D representation comes from the computer program Google Earth and is based primarily on satellite imagery. It displays the planet's surface from a far distance. Zaides swiftly navigates through Google Earth while Gioia is scrolling through the database of the project (the slides and videos). When Zaides starts his navigational choreography with Google Earth and zooms in, the imagery transitions into a refined image of the same area, showing more details of forests, rivers, seas and cities. Google Earth zooms in on the location where we are watching the actual performance of Necropolis: at the Studios of les ballets c de la b, 51°02'37' N 3°43'04' E, 21 September 2020, in the city of Ghent, Belgium. The bird's eye view reveals the nearness of the river Leie, the campus of Ghent University and its famous book tower, and, a bit further, the river Coupure. The resemblance of the satellite images to reality, even though they vary in date and time of perception and registration, has me recognizing familiar spots immediately. I experience a similar joy as when reading a map while walking my way through cities, looking for points of reference.

When I navigate myself through real space by virtue of maps, I tend to rely on the legend and on the map's mimetic relation with reality. This reservoir of signs, architectural schemes and street names allows for a confident passage from one place to another, and this unleashes 'a play of reflections and mirrors.... In question are two simultaneous ways of learning that take place on the terrain itself, that of reading a map and that of reading the city' (Besse 2017: 22). Walter Benjamin

reflected on this joy of reading maps, but also dismantled it as a cosy bourgeois pastime, providing comprehension and control.

In these few moments of comprehensive and confident lingering in two parallel spaces – the actual performance space of the Studios of les ballets c de la b and its localization on Google Earth^[note]³ – our spectators' minds are tuned to set off and to move along with Zaides for a navigational choreography with Google Earth. The satellite image of Ghent zooms out and in again to a nearby location. Data appears on the screen, superimposed on the digital map of Google Earth.

I read the latitude and longitude of GPS coordinates, age, region of origin...

LATITUDE: 50°56'10.4'N | LONGITUDE: 3°05'43.6'E

FOUND DEAD: 17 MAY 2018 | NAME: VLADISLAV BABAYAN | AGE: 29 Y/O |
REGION OF ORIGIN: ARMENIA | CAUSE OF DEATH: SUICIDE, HANGED
HIMSELF IN MERKSPLAS^[note]⁴ (BE) OUT OF FEAR OF DEPORTATION

These data refer to one of the more than 44,764 registered deaths of refugees or migrants who died since 1993 in their attempt to reach Europe. This attempt is not only a physical journey, but also a legal attempt, in the sense of trying to obtain the official documents for becoming a European citizen in the maze of a deadening bureaucratic categorization.

Actually, this is not really the beginning of the performance. Necropolis began with the discovery of the list, a central source of data maintained by UNITED for Intercultural Action – a network of hundreds of anti-racist organizations in Europe.² Wherever Institut des Croisements resides with its long-durational and research-based performance project Necropolis, the list is scrolled through. Local research starts from that particular place of the residency, in close collaboration with local authorities, hospitals, archives and experts, in order to gather further information on the names, gender, age and origin of the deceased refugee or migrant, the place and circumstances of his or her death, and the location of his or her burial place. As such, data continuously feeds the performance. 'There are always local cases in the

² The open-source database is maintained by UNITED for cultural action since 1993. It collects reliable data on refugee deaths since 1993 and is published yearly on June 20th, World Refugee Day. As of June 2021, when the latest updated version was released, the list included data of 44.764 reported "migrant deaths": refugees and migrants who lost their lives on their way to the continent and in their quest for European citizenship. Most probably thousands more are never reported.

various places we visit and work. Every performance will be different and will update the research and the archive' (Zaides in Noeth 2020: 51).

Moving and navigating across the globe, other places of death are located beneath the earth's surface, which Google Earth displays.

LATITUDE: 50°40'49.89'N | LONGITUDE: 5°37'9.20'E

FOUND DEAD: 29 JAN. 2018 | NAME: MOHAMED AHMED | AGE: 39 Y/O |
REGION OF ORIGIN: ETHIOPIA | CAUSE OF DEATH: HIT BY A VEHICLE WHEN
RUNNING ACROSS A MOTORWAY TO AVOID POLICE CHECK NEAR
JABBEKE^[note]5 (BE)

Navigating further through Google Earth, more names of deceased migrants are extracted from the underworld and surface from the satellite images. Zaides relates the names from the list to a real space via localization on Google Maps. He locates the places where migrating bodies ceased moving and reveals them as crime scenes to the audience. Zooming out and in, again and again, the data are materialized in words and numbers on the screen. The repeatedly zooming out and in on new locations becomes a repetitive choreographic phrase, assembling the names of the list in what a voice-over during the performance calls a 'growing funerary encyclopedia'.

The joy of reading maps as a bourgeois pastime makes way for an uncomfortable deep-mapping, exploring 'the stories of place that lie beneath the surface' (Macfarlane 2019: 18). Seeing more deeply, we detect the blind spots in cartography. The map's promise of comprehension is misleading, its mimetic relation with reality is deceptive. There is more to spatial reality than the map represents. One could say that Zaides extracts the bodies' origins and ancestries from the body of data available, but, whereas extraction is usually connected with the deathly processes of colonial capitalism, extracting labour from bodies, minerals and oil from the ground, trees and water from the land, and fish from the sea, this mode of extraction generates factual knowledge.

In a subsequent location, the name of the deceased migrant is absent. In fact, in most of the entries in the list, the names, gender, age and origin of the deceased refugee or migrant is not known. While unidentified people are mentioned in the

UNITED list with the abbreviation N.N. – nomen nescio, the Necropolis team decided not to use this abbreviation but to give all the information (numbers/letters) they could find.

When the vast area of green makes way for a vast area of blue on Google Earth, the names of cities also disappear. We have entered the placeless sea. We experienced this ‘place of delocalization’ through fiction, reflecting the loss of one’s self in a nautical journey, adrift in open sea, far from any visible landmark (Wolf 2017: 144). Odysseus’s journey of eternal wandering resembles that of the migrants, risking their lives in even worse case scenarios, on clandestine, overcrowded boats, in a perilous trip across the sea, risking their lives to migrate by sea. However, whereas in Homer’s Odyssey the main protagonist has a name, most of the ‘protagonists’ of these stories, dated 3 October 2013, only have a corpse number. Only three names are given in the location of the Lampedusa migrant shipwreck. In fact, 373 people drowned, 155 were saved, 12 of them got a (simple) grave. [note]6

I think of Claudia Durastanti’s words in her book The Stranger: ‘When we die, they write on our graves maybe the name of our loved ones, the profession that we had, a sentence from a book that we cherished. What is not written on our grave is the distance from our home’ (2020: 173). [note]7 What strikes me in the extracted data is the absence of singular narratives. Mohamed Ahmed remains a name in a data set. Jabbeke, Merksplas, Vottem [note]8 and Lampedusa remain topographic names on a map. Every tragic narrative is reduced to what the voice-over in Necropolis refers to as ‘dead data’, as a cold ‘body of data’. We have entered the abstract realm of big data and digital maps. No matter how long the list, no matter how many the places of death materialized in words on the map, no matter how closely the map resembles the original space: maps and data do not cover the individual migrant’s tragic itinerary.

Storied places resurging from vexed, storeyed places

However, from these storeyed places laid bare, the migrant’s individual stories resurge. With this notion of resurgence, I expand the notion of repairing to ‘dead’ material. In my view, the verb ‘to repair’ might still be considered an all-too-human-centred action. Borrowing the concept ‘resurgence’ from anthropologist Anna Tsing

(2015: 179--192), I consider 'persistent resurgence' as 'regeneration' (2015: 179) in a more-than-human constellation. To resurge is an intransitive verb: it is characterized by not having or containing a direct object. One can only undergo a resurgence. I deliberately (mis)use the verb 'to resurge' in an active way, acknowledging agency in interconnected 'dead' matter, especially in processes of resurgence that are at stake in Necropolis.

The cracks that come with the activities of extraction and deep-mapping allow for individual stories to resurge. Through its deep-mapping practice, the Necropolis team reveals that the topographic names of Jabbeke, Merksplas, Vottem, Lampedusa, LeNiamh, Dattilo are more than objective spatial locations on a map. Each one appears as a 'vexed place', in the sense of a disturbed place (Haraway 2016: 133). From this disturbed underland, the tragedy of transmigrants at the refugee tent camp stories the vexed place of Jabbeke; the migrant shipwreck on 3 October 2013 stories the vexed place of Lampedusa; the shipwreck on 8 August 2015 stories the vexed place of LeNiamh; the shipwreck on 11 July 2015 stories the vexed place of Dattilo...

I deliberately use the verb 'to story' here, instead of 'to narrate', as Haraway's concept of a vexed place builds on environmental philosopher and anthropologist Thom van Dooren's theory of storytelling, developing 'a nonanthropomorphic, nonanthropocentric sense of storied place' (in Haraway 2016: 39; see also van Dooren 2014: 63--8.) In the storied places of Necropolis, the corpses are voiced, calling upon our responsibility. Beneath the seemingly flat surface of the vast mass of green, brown and blue on Google Earth, at the bottom of the sea, on the shores, and inland, a mass of decomposed bodies and body parts stories European territory. Vexed places become storied places. The storeys of place that lie beneath the surface, and that resurge in the choreographic gesture of deep-mapping, turn the topographic name into a storied place.

Acknowledging storied places means thinking-with these corpses and re-thinking-through their singular narratives. It is an exercise in thinking together in a thick presence and a deep time, with tentacles towards a troubled past and a precarious future. As such, we hear their hope of secretly boarding lorries heading for the UK by ferry. We sense their courage in undertaking extremely dangerous journeys in the hope of reaching the UK, often at the instigation of gangs of human

traffickers. We sense their fear of experiencing problematically low temperatures and oxygen levels in the lorries during their journey to the UK.... Van Dooren would call this deep listening 'a powerful attunement to storying' (2014: 63--86) through the cracks in the seemingly paradise-like place of Europe.

'When confronted by such surfacings it can be hard to look away, seized by the obscenity of the intrusion,' says Robert Macfarlane (2019: 14). Indeed, seeing and listening deeply differs from the 'flat tradition' of geography and cartography, and the largely horizontal worldview that has resulted from it. In his book Vertical, Stephan Graham observes that we 'find it hard to escape the 'resolutely flat perspectives' to which we have become habituated', and he finds this to be 'a political failure as well as a perceptual one, for it disinclines us to attend to the sunken networks of extraction, exploitation and disposal that support the surface world' (in Macfarlane: 13). In what follows, I trace the critical potential of these choreographic gestures of extraction, deep-mapping and resurgence. This critical potential is two-fold: knowledge is extracted and resurges in the blank spaces of oblivion on a perceptual as well as a political level.

Detecting perceptual failures in horizontal mapping

The swiftness with which the choreographer navigates through the digital world map is in sharp contrast with the limitations of movements, the fear and existential disorientation that the refugees and migrants have experienced during their journey. On a perceptual level, the choreographic gestures of extraction, deep-mapping and resurgence unsettle the claim to objectivity in map making. The art of map making reveals itself as a representation system that hides its own representational devices. This 'representational amnesia' (Noyes 2017: 261) is tackled in the friction between Zaides's swift navigational choreography with Google Earth and the migrant's fatal itinerary storying the abstract spatiality of the map.

Navigating through Google Earth, Zaides swiftly 'travels' from city to city, from cemetery to cemetery. He does not follow the meandering route that the migrants have taken, nor does he make any reference to their hard experiences. He simulates an itinerary by connecting in a swift line pre-existing places on the map. Like a guide for a distant gaze-tour, Zaides travels from 'hotspot' to 'hotspot', moving with the

cursor from one place to another, without any regard for how a migrant body would actually move through space, or not move through it -- being brutally stopped by border policies. The corporeal effort of climbing high mountains, following tortuous paths or coping with the engulfment of open sea is reduced to contour lines on a topographic map and depth lines on nautical charts. On Google Earth, even these are absent. What we encounter is vast masses of blue, brown and green spatiality, abstract renderings of reality. The difficulties of travel are a blind spot in this navigational tool.

In fact, while navigating through Google Earth, not the choreographer but the cursor of the computer is the operative device, tracing the spatial displacement from location to location. It grounds the singular names – or the unnamed persons – in a world map and connects them in a spatial web, in an assemblage of familiar places: Merksplas, Jabbeke, Vottem, Madrid, Lampedusa, LeNiamh, Dattilo. Also, in connecting the singular names through these familiar places, the cursor moves the performance ahead, constituting the narrative unfolding of the performance. Google Earth hence plays an organizing role in the development of the narrative and the performance. Google Earth becomes, as Jean-Marc Besse would call it, a ‘spatial plotting’ device, occupying a ‘strategic place’ (2017: 33) in the choreographic rendering – in the sense of organizing the activities on stage. While the cursor moves, the map also moves. It sets the narration in motion, ordering the narrative sequences. In this mobilization of the map, the cursor remains the focal point, the point of orientation of the spectator, moving along with all these singular names, as a kind of digital compass so as not to lose track of oneself in the storeyed underland.

However, the value of Necropolis lies not in charting a navigational relation with the world through digital maps, but in an exploration of the tension between the singularity of the migrant’s narrative, the coldness of big data, and the generality and fixity of cartographic means of representation. Navigating with Zaides through Google Earth, we mostly encounter the unmappability of the singular narratives in abstract systems. As such, Necropolis foregrounds the representational system at work in the abstract spatiality of the map. The coordinate grid, for example, transforms the curved surface of the globe onto the flat surface of the map, following the ‘objective’ mathematical device of latitude and longitude. The bird’s eye – or even godlike – perspective of a map renders the viewer a feeling of overall control in seeing the

world. We look down on space from a disembodied perspective. This godlike perspective overlooks (in the sense of controlling) and overlooks (in the sense of failing to see) at the same time.

Moving along with Zaides's navigational choreography with Google Earth, we recognize that 'as twenty-first-century people, we are products of a map-saturated culture that privileges that spatiality of the grid' (Padrón 2017: 208). With the arrival of digital maps, we are even used to a navigational use of maps, rather than the old-school mimetic use. When we have zoomed out, and the scale of Google Maps is very small, the navigation from one point to another no longer relies on any resemblance between the map and the territory. Streets, alleys and paths (represented in two parallel lines), buildings (represented in coloured squares) and so forth are no longer indicated. Instead, we move through vast areas of green, blue and brown zones, leaving even country borders aside. ^[note]9 Navigating through Google Earth from up above, we experience the misleading consistency of a unity, of a whole world. This suggestion of a 'whole world' is in sharp contrast with the reality of gates, walls, borders and fences that the migrants face in Fortress Europa.

Detecting political failures in our horizontal worldview of expansionism

The choreographic gesture of deep-mapping also unfolds its critical potential on a political level when the map's representation of ownership is unsettled. Necropolis reveals how the territorial map not only hides its representational strategies but also its own genesis: the conquest of territory and the violent history of European expansionism, colonialism and imperialism. Listening deeply to the storied places of Necropolis, we also encounter the vexed places as being disturbed and burdened with the barbaric flipside of our history of civilization. The voice-over ^[note]10 painstakingly reminds us of that:

As we keep moving above, around and through Necropolis, let's not forget everything we see in this landscape of death is made of ourselves.... From the North a glacier of border regulations and bureaucratic classification. From the West a narrow gorge of falsified

history of conquest and enslavement, of abuse and exploitation, of greed and betrayal...

As Ricardo Padrón observes, 'the grid presents space for optical inspection, saying nothing about how knowledge of that space came into being' (Padrón 2017: 207). Untangling the relationship of ownership, territorial conquest and cartographic representation, Burkhardt Wolf outlines how Empire had a firm partner in navigational tools and maps, linking sea faring with sea trade and hence providing 'the prototype of institutionalized occidental empirical knowledge' (2017: 162). By the sixteenth century, 'cartography in emerging Empire provided a powerful framework for political expansion and control' (Woodward in Padrón 2017: 199).

What is striking, for example, is how literally blank spaces in explorers' maps indicated those areas that still needed to be discovered and explored, erasing in fact existing histories for the benefit of future, imperial histories. The genesis of explorers' maps reveals a ruthless white colonial seizure of land, replacing the indigenous' spatial tradition of land stewardship with the colonizer's practice of land ownership and the greedy exploitation of land. Quite similar to the way in which our swift navigation through Google Earth is oblivious of the embodied knowledge of the migrant's itinerary, the explorer's map proves to be oblivious of indigenous spatial traditions.

John K. Noyes further explains how grid mathematics eventually aligned cartography with 'a discourse of truth about colonial ownership' (2017: 261). The explorer's map is oblivious of its own violent, colonial land seizure. Between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, cartographers gradually erased the image of the sailing ship on explorers' maps, for example, erasing the practices of European maritime expedition. As such, the territorial map gradually turned into an autonomous document of truth, cut off from the violent history of European expansionism (de Certeau in Noyes 2017: 261).

The voice-over in Necropolis testifies to this barbaric flip side of the map as a tool of civilization. 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism', it says, referring to Walter Benjamin's seventh thesis on the philosophy of history, in which he states that civilization is a crime scene. 'Refuse to investigate the crime', the voice-over continues, 'and barbarism will return to haunt

you. It is important to acknowledge that this most obvious truth about history is the one you are most inclined to forget.'

What resurges here in the blank spaces on the Euclidian fields of the map are the disqualified embodied indigenous spatial traditions, and the corpses haunting these spaces. Connecting the fate of migrants with occidental expansion in the past, Necropolis detects a political failure in our expansive, horizontal worldview that is also part of the history of cartography. We become aware of the limitations in cartographic representations and of the violence with which their making is intertwined. This is 'the principle of ruin and destruction' that lies 'at the heart of the cartographic drive', and which Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges demonstrated in his story 'On Exactitude in Science' (1946). Borges pushes the utopian ideal of cartographic representation to the absurd limit of copying and imitating an already existing territory in an absolute map on a scale of one on one. As such, the utopian idea of Empire is the 'production of a whole new hallucinatory reality' (Bosteels 1988: 132).

Necropolis as cartographic heterotopia

Necropolis produces a completely different, new hallucinatory reality on a scale of one on one: that of a cartographic Heterotopia of the Dead. On the basis of their deathright (a term coined by dramaturg Igor Dobricic as a reference to the word birthright), the deceased migrants and refugees are granted citizenship of Necropolis, the city of the Dead. Eventually, and throughout the long-duration performance project of Necropolis, a whole invisible city resurges from the underland. It houses tens of thousands of bodies that are absent, silenced or drowned, and is expanding constantly. As the voice-over in the performance recounts:

this map which is the territory, is stretching in all directions in the space-time interrelation of mythologies, histories, geographies, and anatomies of those to whom we have granted the entrance.

...We are rebuilding it out of what and whom we choose to remember. We are maintaining it by sharing our memories with others and we are

letting it crumble into disrepair by which we individually and collectively forget.

As such, Necropolis resurges as an archive of forgotten bodies, a heterotopia of absent bodies, or a Foucauldian counteremplacement, in which Utopia acquires an inverted reality that can be imaginatively grasped and thought. This heterotopian affirmation is not about displaying a non-existent reality, but about displaying a dimension of reality that can be imagined and that disturbs our superficial or indifferent thoughts. The choreographic gesture of deep-mapping hence 'makes visible the unknown that nestles in the real' (Besse 2017: 31).

In itself, Necropolis as heterotopia is contradictory. In Necropolis, 'We live, but we are not alive. We are dead, but we never died. The only thing we desire is to forget that we still have a body' (voice-over). However, the heterotopia of Necropolis is not a reality that is not, but a reality that cannot be. Necropolis is what Besse calls a 'cartographic heterotopia': 'the reality of a non-existent reality' (2017: 30). As such, the city of the dead acts upon us, spectators and witnesses, as a hidden dimension of reality, 'a collective body, haunting us' (Zaides in Noeth 2020: 51).

A dark, warm, damp network of underground passages interrelating decomposing left-overs, assembling all the corpses, hundreds, thousands of them, into a sprawling landscape made of hardened cartilage and leathered skin into a raising architecture built on bones. One shared organism. A promise of an eternal life as exuberant and exhilarating as a violent death at sea. (voice-over)

The counteremplacement of Necropolis resembles Walter Benjamin's Paris as 'Die Stadt im Spiegel' or the vision of the Saami of the underland as a perfect inversion of the human realm, with the ground as the mirror-line, such that 'the feet of the dead, who must walk upside down, touch those of the living, who stand upright' (in Macfarlane 2019: 18). It is the 'intimacy of that posture' that is particularly touching to me – 'the dead and the living standing sole to sole' in the counteremplacement of Necropolis (Macfarlane 2019: 18).

Choreographic gestures as deathrites

The archive of Necropolis is ever-expanding and growing continuously, as, with every performance, another part of the invisible city of Necropolis is retrieved. In fact, every research-based performance of Necropolis is a public presentation in the long-durational performance project. Every time the team of Institut des Croisements is invited to a particular venue or city, local research is started by grave-location searchers, in close collaboration with local authorities, hospitals, archives and experts. Since the start of the project, grave-location searchers from all over Europe have located burial places and performed small rituals while visiting the migrants' graves. In these commemoration rituals, memories of forgotten bodies resurge. The grave-location searchers register the visit, following a fixed choreographic protocol, and these images not only become part of the ever-expanding archive of the long-durational performance project, they are also integrated in the research-based performance of Necropolis.

Shortly after the data of Mohamed Ahmed appears on the screen -- 39 years old, hit by a vehicle when avoiding police check in Jabbeke -- we perceive the registered visit to his grave. The location of the grave is first rendered in longitude and latitude, then materialized in the images of the actual public place of the cemetery. The grave-location searchers have followed a fixed choreographic protocol: the images are filmed with a smartphone, held horizontally at chest level, while advancing from the cemetery gate to the grave. We walk along, on the paths leading towards the grave. When we reach Ahmed's grave, there is no tomb, no plaque, only a heap of soil full of weeds. Ahmed's grave contrasts with the neat tomb next to him, with a photo of a white man in a smart suit, smiling confidently at us. Throughout the performance, we encounter other graves in other cultures, in several locations across Europe. Some have crooked crosses, others carry sober stones that are covered with moss and leaves. Walking along to these graves, we encounter big statues of Christ, monuments in honour of death heroes, bushes, other graves, other names.

The graves of the anonymous dead of the shipwreck in Lampedusa carry papers with their names on, their tatters stirred by the breeze. The sound of migratory birds (probably geese) resonates with the faith of these migratory people.

The wind hovers in the microphone of the grave-location searcher's smartphone. Zaides lowers the volume on his technological device on stage. The wind becomes silent, but remains visible. In my mind's eye, the paper tatters become rag flags of the nationless territory of Necropolis. Like Tibetan prayer flags, they serve no other goal than to send prayers to the wind. Just like birds do with the wind that carries them, these rag flags render the invisible visible.

Performing rituals of forensic investigation

Pathologist or forensic expertise enables us to extract medical and biological data from corpses in order to enable identification. However, as opposed to deaths in armed conflict and humanitarian disaster, migrant deaths do not require systematic identification in Europe. European jurisdiction fails to present an international framework for a systematic identification of migrant deaths. A growing number of bodies in the UNITED list are labelled as numbers or as nomen nescio and are buried in anonymous graves. This complicates the mourning process of the migrant's families, who are kept in the dark about the fate of missing relatives.

In the final part of Necropolis, Arkadi Zaides and Emma Gioia perform a forensic choreography with sculptures^[note]¹¹ by Moran Senderovich, also rendered into a 3D avatar by video artist Jean Hubert. The sculpture consists of lifelike body parts that are on display at a forensic research table. Zaides and Gioia take these body parts one by one, gaze at them very intensely, caress the skin, the hair, stretch the folds in the skin, and put them on a table in front of them, recomposing the body/bodies of which they once were part. Not once do they look at the audience. Their focus on the decomposed remains is total. In this danse macabre, they 'perform rituals of forensic investigation over the scattered remains', resurging bodies back to life. 'Of course, this doesn't bring the dead back to life, but it's a movement towards the ones who lost their lives' (Zaides in Noeth 2020: 51). Repair is impossible.

When the grave-location searchers perform their small rituals of commemoration, and when Zaides and Gioia choreograph the scattered remains into a recursive and fragmented whole, they team up with things for processes of resurgence, creating 'conditions for ongoingness' (Haraway 2016: 37). These are of

particular value in the scorched, parched, drowned and infected landscape we currently inhabit. Haraway values art for these 'practices for resurgence' (2018: 82). Building on her thoughts, Necropolis then speaks 'resurgence to despair (...) in the face of extermination' (2018: 71, 76). However, a complete restoration, salvation or reconciliation is impossible. The resurgent art practices in Necropolis are not 'nostalgia-driven reconstructions' (187). Moving away from the (impossible) dictum of curing, Necropolis suggests new and vital modes of caring in a 'resurgent world' (3). As such, tragic hope transcends despair and moves beyond hopelessness, but equally evades the trap of shallow optimism, which does not take despair seriously enough.

The practice of 'speaking resurgence to despair' in Necropolis is connected with the broader context of the collaborative long-duration performance project of Necropolis. As such, Necropolis does not stop when the curtains are closed and the applause is given. 'The project has no clear beginning or end.... It doesn't stop, because this kind of killing doesn't stop and will probably escalate' (Zaides in Noeth 2020: 52). The ever-expanding collaborative practices, this 'form of jointly dealing with questions of responsibility' (Noeth 2020: 51) also concerns the spectator who by watching becomes implicated in thinking along with the project and who may act. We 'become part of a tragedy by looking at it' (Zaides in Noeth 2020: 51). The experience of 'deep time' in the understoreys of Necropolis renders us a 'radical perspective, provoking us to action not apathy' (Macfarlane 2019: 15). To think in deep time is a means 'not of escaping our troubled present, but rather of re-imagining it; countermanding its quick greeds and furies with older, slower stories of making and unmaking. At its best, a deep time awareness might help us see ourselves as a web of gift, inheritance and legacy' (Macfarlane 2019: 15). As such we do not recompose the dead in Necropolis, we become-with them. In our intimate connection with the counterreplacement of Necropolis, their voices speak through us. What is at stake, then, is a persistent resurgence of the dead in this barren landscape we inhabit, continuously and dynamically sprawling into a thousand plateaus.

The city of the dead is this city, and this city is theirs. As you walk out onto the street, remember. Every blade of grass pushing its way through the pavement is growing from their rotten flesh. Living trees are

their tombstones. The air that you breathe is their sigh. You inhale and they are inside of you. You exhale and the wind blowing through the branches speaks in their voice. Please, listen.

Notes

1 Institut des Croisements is a French non-profit association, founded and directed by Simge Gücük and Arkadi Zaidés with Benjamin Perchet as president. The association is supported by the French Ministry of Culture/DRAC Auvergne Rhône-Alpes. Institut des Croisements' mission is to promote Zaidés's work as well as to represent contemporary artists and produce cultural events.

2 I would like to thank Arkadi Zaidés for the conversations and talk-walks on the performance project of Necropolis. I also thank him for the collaborative workshop NECROPOLIS we jointly organized at Ghent University, 8--19 March 2021, teaming up with students from diverse disciplines in the context of the university broad elective course Human Rights: Multidisciplinary Perspectives taught by my colleague in law studies Eva Brems.

3 I watched a work-in-progress presentation of Necropolis as part of les ballets C de la B CoLabo open presentations on 21 September 2020. In every location Necropolis is presented, the journey starts from the very point where the performance is taking place.

4 Merksplas is an immigration detention centre near Antwerp.

5 Jabbeke is a municipality located in the Belgian province of West Flanders, near Bruges. It has a refugee tent camp, where transmigrants stay in the hope of secretly boarding lorries heading for the UK by ferry.

6 In this specific cemetery (Cimitero Piano Gatta, Agrigento, Sicily) 86 of the 373 drowned people are buried in five family tombs; the three mentioned names are three brothers and sisters; another person who is identified in this location is their mother

who is buried in another family tomb in the same location. (Information provided by Arkadi Zaides and the Necropolis team.)

7 Translation mine.

8 Vottem is a migration detention center, near Liège.

9 Usually in Google Earth the state borders are indicated but they can be removed by unchecking a box, which the Necropolis team does, thus it is a deliberate decision to leave the borders aside. (Information provided by Arkadi Zaides and his Necropolis team).

10 Igor Dobricic, the dramaturg of Necropolis, wrote the text and also gave his voice to the work.

11 The sculptures are referred to in the plural, even though only one body/avatar is recomposed from it. The Necropolis team sees the body parts sculptures as individual objects that belong to different bodies. (Information provided by Arkadi Zaides and the Necropolis team).

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