

Memphis Belle



- The subtitles I am using for my chapters are taken from the film 'Paris is Burning'. In the film, they are used to describe certain terms or persons which will be explained or presented in further Interview- or Imagematerial. –

I. Mother – Aka: Let's get it started

"Maybe I could take this tape for my Solo next year. But is it really something that I would like to work on?" – April 2017.

The subject that I was thinking about is a tape that I recorded for my mum when I was five years old. It was for her 35th birthday. I was a kid; very creative, very shameless. I just wanted to sing, tell stories and invent poems. Tears started to crawl down my cheeks when I listened to this tape almost 20 years after the record. My god, I was so young. I was such a lovely girl.

I was like: "I know myself; my Solo will be about something personal, something quite emotional. Something that concerns my story."

Since I started to think about the Solo so early, I had the time to let it work internally before I finally spoke about some ideas to Claire and the class in September 2017. Over the summer, I started to realize that this tape means something to me; Something that I could not explain for quite a while. Then I read this article about refugees in which the author was mentioning the word 'origin' just trivially to talk about a topic which concerns all those people coming from foreign countries, trying to find shelter. And suddenly I had this 'Click'. Origin. This is what the tape means to me. My story, where I am coming from, who I was, which identity I had and where I belonged to. And I realized that the question of origin is more relevant than ever, even in the bigger scale. Desperate people looking for a new home, challenging the status quo of living in the countries they flee to. Conservatives speaking about patriarchy, nationality and brotherhood, trying to keep the borders closed so that their origins will not be threatened by someone having other origins.

Furthermore, I thought about humanity facing the biggest planetary crisis in history, having to take the decision whether killing mother earth or taking care of our origins.

I could go on, talking about different layers of origin, but I decided quite early to not fan out the topic so much so that I could concentrate on my own perception of origin, still keeping in mind the bigger context.

Origin - Synonyms: ancestor, ancestry, connection, element, influence, motive, root, source, seed, spring, author, base, causality, creator, egg, embryo, fountain, impulse, inception, inspiration, parentage, principle

Origin – Antonyms: conclusion, effect, end, outcome, outgrowth, termination, result, close, completion, consequence, death, destiny, finale, goal

"The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao;
the name that can be named is not the eternal name.

The **Nameless** is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
the Named is the mother of all things."

-Lao Tzu

"Because of this,
originality consists in returning to the origin."

-Antoni Gaudi

Ancestry, influence, connection, root... what does that tell me? All along, I wanted to embed my topic in a wider context. In a political context. Although everything can be considered as political. So what is my politic in that? I started to spread my focus once again into the direction of movements of protest in Europe. Why Europe? Because I didn't want to get lost in the chaos of the world. You can find movement and protest everywhere at the moment. So I thought I want to think and read about demonstrations and their motives in Europe. Because they all belong to one 'original' root for me: the question of origin. Very soon I realized that even that was far too big as a topic for a 15 minute Solo in the end. Thus, I narrowed my research to protests of women in modern society, because it is

still so relevant nowadays. Even in social media, women started to burst out and talk about their experiences of sexual abuse or whatever abuse they experienced in the past or in the present. “#Me, too”.

I sat down on my balcony thinking about sexual abuse and abuse in wider contexts; as lower payment for women in the same position as men for example. What was the origin of this problem? Where in history did that start? Or is it rooted already in the bible saying that Eva is made out of Adams bones? Is that written like that? Or is it just a rumor? Is man the “stronger” gender? Since I am a woman, I am deeply concerned about that topic, even though I can say that I do not agree with some modern feminist theories in which men are the bad ones and women are the victims. I will come back more deeply to that topic in another chapter.

Sitting there on my balcony in the sun, I told myself that it is such a shame that even nowadays in such a ‘developed’ (western) world, we still have deep issues when it comes to equality and acknowledgement of every human being, no matter which gender or non-gender.

So how should I approach that whole thing - still having my original idea of the tape in my mind? I am not a specialist, neither in modern feminism, in politics, in gender-studies nor in history. So somehow, I had to find my own way to approach this.

I felt a strength within when I was thinking about women having to fight for their rights, since always, even though it has not been as fightfull as nowadays or since almost 100 years.

I listened to female choirs in Poland, getting goosebumps while listening to it. There was such a power in their voices and souls. I started to listen again to Sinead O’Connor who had been declared ‘crazy’ because she could not stand being famous anymore. After giving one of her last concerts, she showed the fuck finger to the public because they booed her out. She might got broken by trying to give space to all the pain of the world in her songs.

They tried to fool the black population
By telling them that jah jah dead
And they tried to fool the black population
By telling them that jah jah dead.
I & i knows jah - jah no dead - jah no dead
-Sinead O’Connor¹

By reading her song texts, I got deeply touched because her strength came through every single word she sang. She dared to speak out what billion of people didn’t dare to even look at. There is something in womanhood which is so strong that I even find no words for it to describe what I mean. It is a strong feeling that I wanted to look closer at.

Speaking and acting, we intervene into the world of humans,
Which existed before we were born into it.
And this Intervention
Is like a second birth in which we confirm the naked fact of ‘being born’,
So to speak taking the responsibility for it.
-Hannah Arendt²

Hannah Arendt is accompanying me since a long time already. I’ve been always amazed by her strength and her clear words. I decided to read her texts about politics and society as a research. Just to feel a little bit the strength of a woman who has cristal clear visions about global and general human challenges.

¹ Song: Jah nu dead – Sinead O’Connor, Release 2005

² Hannah Arendt - Formation, Exile and Totalitarianism, 1930-54

No problems in paradise, we'll lock them up
We all gotta sacrifice, it won't be long
Shut the borders, burn the other, sons and daughters, and the mothers
Drink the Kool-Aid, it's a new way, do what I say.

Golden idols holding rivals, take my body, anybody
I'm your trophy, make my nose bleed, now you own me.
-Pussy Riot³

What I like about Pussy Riot is that they are so fearless. They knew they would come to prison once they get caught, but that didn't matter to them. They want something to change in Russia, so they go for it, deeply provoking the system and the political status quo.

Every man gives his life for what he believes.
Every woman gives her life for what she believes.
Sometimes people believe in little or nothing, and so they give their lives
To little or nothing. One life is all we have, and we live it as we believe in living it..
And then it's gone.
But to surrender who you are and to live without belief is more terrible than dying
- even more terrible than dying young.

I was admonished to adopt feminine clothes;
I refused, and still refuse.
As for other avocations of women, there are plenty
Of other women to perform them.
- Jeanne d'arc⁴

Jeanne d'arc was a special case in the middle age. She has been chosen to liberate France from England, because she was the holy virgin who could hear the voices of god and the angels who led her to achieve the liberation. Although most of the population was skeptical about her being the new leader, she could make it to lead a whole army. Almost until the end of the war, she fought with them, always following the voices even though she could not hear them anymore after a while. As it looked like the war was not won, she got burned as a witch. After her death, France was liberated from England and everybody celebrated her holy spirit. I find the story very paradoxical. The war always has been – and still is today – a male thing. It is considered as destructive and violent. Women should not enter the warfield. Nevertheless, Jeanne d'arc is celebrated as THE woman who could lead a whole army to FIGHT against another country. France seemed to win the war and everybody was happy to have Jeanne as a leader. But with the smallest glimpse of failing, everything turned into the normal procedure. A woman with strange knowledge who tried to fuel the population had to be killed violently. She was considered a threatening witch. Crazy enough that she is used as the idol-face of the 'Front National', the party in France which is extremely right oriented. Again, I find it pervert that normally, women should be kept out of war – even though this attitude changed throughout the past thirty years, because it has become a necessity that almost every citizen of a country could fight against the enemy. In some cultures, in Israel for example, women have to do the army training – like the men. Since they are surrounded by conflict zones and even are in the middle of an ongoing conflict, the society – no matter which gender – should be trained how to fight. In the case of the 'Front National', in my opinion, they mobilize the fact that Jeanne had the call to save her country into a nationalistic, still patriarchal view. They totally abandon the fact that she had been burned as a witch in the end which means that in the end, male power (church and state) has broken

³ Song: Police State – Pussy Riot, Release 2017

⁴ Joan of Arc: In her own words, Published May 1st 1996 by Turtle Point Press by Willard Trask

through again. Now they just use her as something which is nationalistic and not – what it was originally – as a virgin who had the strength to try to break through the male hierarchy, following inner voices.

Lysistrata: "Here goes, then; no need to beat around the bush. Ladies, if we're going to force the men to make peace, we're going to have to give up—"

Calonice: "Give up what? Tell us."

Lysistrata: "You'll do it, then?"

Calonice: "We'll do it, even if it means our death!"

Lysistrata: "All right. We're going to have to give up—the prick. Why are you turning away from me? Where are you going? Why are you all pursing your lips and shaking your heads? What means your altered color and tearful droppings? Will you do it or not? What are you waiting for?"

Calonice: "Count me out; let the war drag on."

Myrrhine: "Me too, by Zeus; let the war drag on." (119-130)

-Lysistrata⁵

Lysistrata by Aristophanes is a piece about war, money and sex in its deeper meaning. Those words are still so relevant nowadays. Aristophanes, even in those early days, could see that one has to have a critical eye towards these topics. What I like about the piece is that Lysistrata, although she is considered as the weak gender having to take care about the children and the men while they are out in the field, has the strength to bring all women together to withdraw sex from their husbands to stop the war. She knows that they will win, because sex is a force which stimulates the men to have the energy to go back to war. And once they won't have that stimulation anymore, they will fall apart. Of course, this is very sarcastic and might not be true in real but I enjoy the joke which somehow is still true in a bigger sense. Women should be there to 'make the men happy', to give their bodies and not to stand up and point out the finger on something which is destructive. Aristophanes points out the feminine power or quality of balancing a conflict, bringing peace and harmony by using their force.

What is interesting to point out talking about Lysistrata and the role of women in war or generally in relationships – especially back in those times – is the work of Joan Tronto. She speaks about the ethics of care⁶ in a very global and social way. She says that 'caring' lies in human nature and will always play a big role in our interdependence. Basically, one could say that 'caring' is really something that women should do – when one looks back in history. But I ask myself the question if there isn't also the question of 'caring' when men go to war wanting to protect their country. For sure, this gets very delicate. Because the destructive force of war has nothing to do with 'caring' in the end. But I am not sure if there isn't a total strange understanding of 'caring' in this case. Or men going to work to earn enough money to support their families. Also here, it gets delicate once one justifies the fact that women should stay at home 'caring' for the family while men go to work also 'caring' for the family. Quickly – like in everything when it comes to different understandings of things – one finds oneself in justifications and inequalities built by entanglements of human minds. I avoid going deeper into this specific topic, because one could write thousands of books about it. It is just an interesting question for me. The question of 'caring' and who cares for whom and also which relationships we have once we talk about 'caring'. Isn't there a human beauty in 'caring' which women have in their biology because they can give birth? I am aware that one should be careful by speaking about this whole topic. It gets easily confusing, because it is not justifiable that women have to be suppressed to 'care' (in a negative understanding) because it is anyway in their nature. Their should be an equal understanding of the fact that 'caring' lies in human nature and lives in women AND men and can be seen as a potential for an equal social and global context.

⁵ Lysistrata – Aristophanes, written in 411 BCE, The Eleven Comedies of Aristophanes: Complete in one Volume (Unexpurgated Edition) (Halcyon Classics) (English Edition), 20.12.2009

⁶ Moral Boundaries: Political Argument for an Ethic of care – Joan Tronto, Published 1993, Taylor & Francis

II. Walking – Aka: Going deeper

Even in the weeks in which we didn't have any time to work on our projects, my solo was very present in my mind. It felt like a big soup with many different ingredients, still having a similar taste though. Quite early, I started to ask myself the question how I can turn all that into movement. My perfectionism was ringing the bell and spoke to me. "You have to go into the studio and have to work out some clear movement qualities. Now." But I realized, this is what I would have done 2 years ago. I would have felt a lot of stress, trying to do the 'right' things at the 'right' time. Having the voice of my perfectionism in mind, I went for a long walk by the lake. I felt a calmness inside which I didn't really know to that extent so far. I was calm. Really calm. And I realized that I want to trust myself. I want to trust the whole thing that it will develop in its natural speed and its natural process. I don't know if it was fate, but the schedule said, that we will have two weeks of a 'Gender, Sex and Race' Workshop with Fabian in September. Fortunately, it was so early in the schoolyear, because this is where I started to set the foundation for the solo. I was moved by our discussions and more specifically about Silvia Federici, who wrote the book 'Caliban and the witch'.

"According to [the] new social-sexual contract, proletarian women became for male workers the substitute for the land lost to the enclosures, their most basic means of reproduction, and a communal good anyone could appropriate and use at will. Echoes of this 'primitive appropriation' can be heard in the concept of the 'common woman' which in the 16th century qualified those who prostituted themselves. But in the new organization of work every woman (other than those privatized by bourgeois men) became a communal good, for once women's activities were defined as non-work, women's labor began to appear as a natural resource, available to all, no less than the air we breathe or the water we drink."

"[T]he construction of a new patriarchal order, making of women the servants of the male work-force, was a major aspect of capitalist development."

"On its basis a new sexual division of labor could be enforced that differentiated not only the tasks that women and men should perform, but their experiences, their lives, their relation to capital and to other sectors of the working class. Thus, no less than the international division of labor, the sexual division of labor was above all a power-relation, a division within the work-force, while being an immense boost to capital accumulation."

- Silvia Federici⁷

Already in my late teenage years, I've been busy with Karl Marx and his visions on capitalism, but when I read and talked about the book of Silvia Federici, I realized how deeply the construction of reality in history still influences today's reality, especially when it comes to gender questions. I felt that there is so much I can not even grasp because it is so huge and subtle at the same time. Since I was taking a closer look on the whole topic of the stories of womanhood in my solo, I wanted to know more about that. While I was so much into researching and reading, I tried to keep in mind the physical aspect of it. Sometimes, I would go into the studio, trying to find some movement qualities or whatever would come, and not so rarely, I got stuck. I was so much into reading, watching videos and thinking, that I could not concentrate on the concrete form yet. I tried to find music for inspiration, which is always one of the hardest things for me, and I found one piece by a composer from Israel, which was quite dynamic, to improvise on⁸. In the first weeks, I concentrated on the question: 'How do protest movements look like?', 'How do I embody that - having a female body?' The turning point – I can see this now from the distance – was the Voguing Ball on the 6th of October 2017, the same day as we watched the film 'Paris is burning', organized by students of the school.

⁷ Caliban and the witch: Women, the body and primitive accumulation– Silvia Federici, Published 1998, NYC

⁸ White Noise – Ran Bagno

Quite spontaneously I decided to participate in the category 'Un rien ne m'habille', because I knew that I would probably love to do the catwalk. And I loved it. I decided to dress in Burlesque-clothes that I bought a couple of years ago, because I had always been amazed by beautiful and erotic clothing. I won the prize of the evening. I was thrilled and surprised by myself. Obviously, there was something that I enjoyed so much in doing that. I couldn't really find words for this feeling but I knew that this was the feeling that I had when I was reading Hannah Arendt, Pussy Riot, Lysistrata etc. A certain internal 'puissance', a seductive force which can be wild and caring at the same time. When I am writing about that, the amazone comes to my mind. The female warrior.



Thrilled by this feeling and inspired by the film 'Paris is burning', I could sense that I can zoom in a bit more regarding my research.

"Paris Is Burning" is a 1990 American documentary film directed by Jennie Livingston. Filmed in the mid-to-late 1980s, it chronicles the ball culture of New York City and the African-American, Latino, gay, and transgender communities involved in it. Some critics consider the film to be an invaluable documentary of the end of the "Golden Age" of New York City drag balls, and a thoughtful exploration of race, class, gender, and sexuality in America."¹⁰

After watching the film, I felt sad and I couldn't really explain why. Later I understood that I had the impression that the characters in the film quest for a certain 'heteronorm' which contains being white, rich, beautiful, famous etc, although they are not hetero, not white and not rich. They quested for another identity; for an identity which –in my eyes- in its essence can be superficial, empty and focused on consume and wealth.

Particularly, I got touched by Venus Xtravaganza, a transvestite who had also been a participant in the balls. In the interviews, she was exactly talking about the topic of 'wanting to become' the rich, white girl having the possibility to have children, a husband and a home. I could read the wish for a stable life in which she could do whatever she wanted to, because in her current life, she couldn't. In the end of the film, one understands that she got murdered by a client of the escort service.

⁹ Image describes one idea of an amazone for me (not taken from the film 'Paris is burning'), private source

¹⁰ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Is_Burning

The life of transvestites or generally gay people has been (and partly still is) dangerous, because it was considered as abnormal and sometimes even threatening.

“The film explores drag queen culture and how it deals with gender roles, addressing complex issues within culture that demonstrate the intersectionality of race, gender and class. Some of the performers are transsexual and associate their desire for a gender treatment with their desire for wealth and advancement in a racist society; Venus Xtravaganza says, “I want to be a rich white girl.”¹¹

What I can say now is that quite early in the research process, I asked myself the questions “What makes a man want to become a woman? What is it in femininity that is ‘attractive’?”

Furthermore, through conversations with Claire I realized that my outer appearance is what Xtravaganza is looking for. I wouldn’t say that I am rich, neither spoiled, although I am clearly privileged. But in her eyes, I am rich, white and spoiled indeed. It was a strange feeling to think that I describe a role model without having chosen it. I decided to play with that in my research by using typical feminine clothes which are erotic and underline the picture of the tall blonde girl.

Also because of my personal experience of the Voguing ball, I realized that this topic could be my ‘Zoom in’ of the more global or general topic of gender and womanhood.

I furthermore realized that also Venus Xtravaganza was looking for identity and asked herself similar questions that I had in mind when I listened to the tape that I recorded 20 years ago.

The answers she gave in the interviews with her were quite touching for me and I decided to take her answers and to read and learn the text that I will choose from it so that I can deal with her personality and try to let myself being inspired by her.

Since the beginning of the process, I always had in mind that for me personally, pieces are very strong if they portray a ‘Zoom in’ of a certain topic. In my case, the question fitting to that would be: ‘How can I bring together the ‘whole’ history of womanhood and gender questions in my own little story?’ Of course, that sounds very ambitious, but it was always an underlying leading question for me.

By speaking to Natacha Koutchoumov who was my external eye, I realized that – when I want to zoom in- I have to find an answer to the following questions:

1. What in the Catwalk during the Voguing ball was interesting for me?
2. What happened?
3. What does it tell me about myself?
4. Why is it interesting to dress up?

Having those questions in mind, I started once again a big research phase watching videos and trying to find movement qualities fitting to those questions. New fields opened up.



The studio research kept being blurry for me until the end of December. I did some improvisations here and there and tried to dress up in different clothes.

¹¹ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Is_Burning

I still tried to combine the childish idea of the tape with the search of identity of a woman. Dancing in a Snoopy-Pyjama, combining it with erotic suspenders, I felt a bit stupid and not fully engaged. I tried to speak into the microphone imagining an audience listening to a dancer who tries to build up a one-woman-show by talking in a high female voice which was inspired by the film 'Cabaret'. Most of the time, it felt ridiculous and even when I tried to push my comfort zones with Natacha, I didn't feel it at all. I questioned my idea of the 'One-Woman-Show' which came up when I researched about the origins of Burlesque and Cabaret. I listened to Marilyn Monroes voice trying to copy it in the end. But what for? I felt I was on the wrong track. But now I know that all this was tremendously important. I had to go to the extremes to reduce myself in the end. Throughout all that, I still felt a certain confidence that it will achieve a level with which I will be (hopefully) happy in the end. The dynamic israelian music track that I had found still felt relevant, because I liked moving to it. But it stood in total contrast to all the other things that I was researching on physically. With the help of Natacha and Claire, I figured out that the track is too obvious. It felt a bit like 'the liberated woman who dances to a powerful music wanting to show that she is strong and free'. Next to all that, I knew that I certainly will work on movement tools that I had learned in the past years throughout my studies. While working with Shai Faran who I know since many years already, I felt that her way of approaching dance suited me in a very full and coherent way. I wanted to work on her propositions, because my body could connect to it so easily and honestly.

Inspiration: Sandra Elgort
Burlesque

12.10.17

- Music: Various Artists 13.10.2017
- Jazz Nair (Not now music)
- Full album
- Titel-Idee: Memphis Belle (Bedeutung!!!)
- Liza Minnelli Cabaret
(Outfit?) → Eleganz, kluge, Kokett
- Kabarett: "Soll politische Ereignisse persiflieren, die Menschheit belehren, ihr ihre Dummheit verhalten, dem Mucker die schlechte Laune abgewöhnen."
- Tucholsky schrieb fürs Kabarett
- Circus/ Cabaret/ Accordion/ Vintage style songs.
- So far, so Hollywood.

→ Shai Faran.

17.10.17

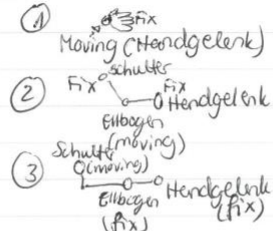
- Nina Martin.
- The brain needs to predict the future
- Fast score: fuzzy baby; get underneath the planning; let the mind float...

→ SHAI

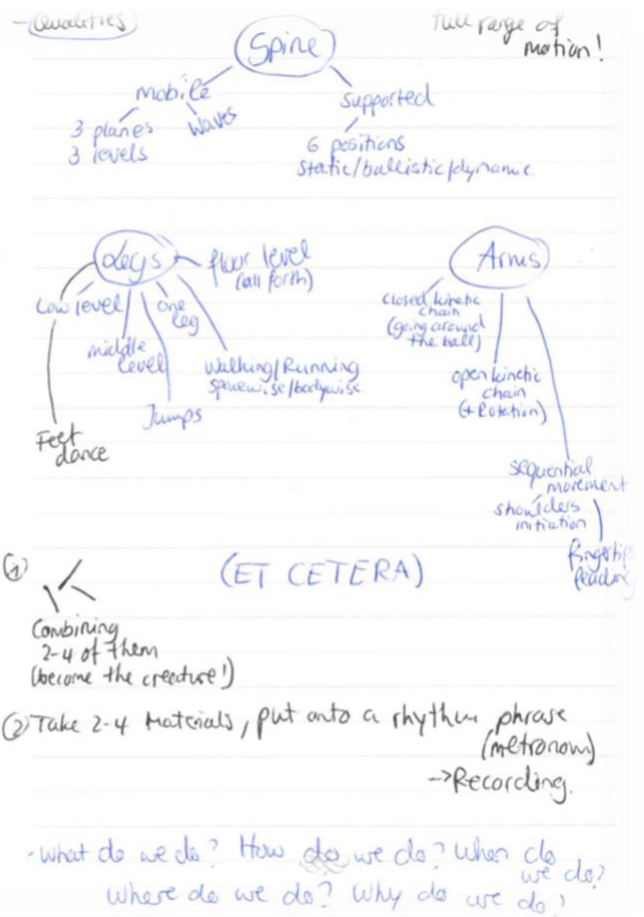
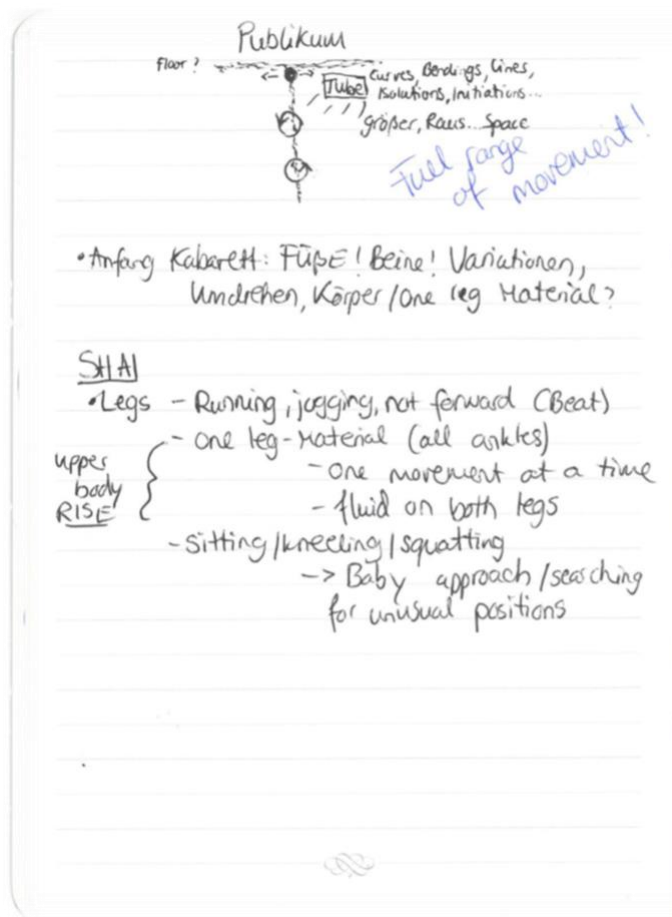
- Kopf, Brust, Hüfte: transversal, sagittal
Planes

→ Übergänge

- Closed chain movement



- Schulterartikulation (Initiation)



The time in the studio became more and more important. I tried to clarify the 'Zoom in' that I was aiming for. For this, I decided to throw myself into every field that I have researched on so far. I danced Burlesque (at least what I understood as Burlesque) to specific music pieces in this genre. I listened to songs of the film 'Cabaret'¹² which I liked a lot because they were political and sarcastic at the same time ('Money makes the world go round...') and included the provocative almost naked body of women. I found out that both Burlesque and Cabaret in the beginning were ways of provoking the system by questioning social views and opinions. In the beginning of the 20th century, especially in Europe and America, the world seemed to see that also women have a sexuality and desires which they want to live and enjoy. Sigmund Freud carefully wrote about the female sexuality ("Was will das Weib?"). In Germany during the Weimar Republic, women started to smoke in public, to wear trousers and flat shoes and to dance freely during nighttime after 1918 the prohibition of dance was disbanded. Since most of the men have been either killed or injured in the first world war, the society was in need of work forces. Thus, women started to work in factories and refused to stay at home, because they experienced the possibility to earn their own money. Nurses were tremendously important at that time to care about the injured soldiers. Socially – or lets say superficially – the liberation of the women took place.¹³ And that was a very important time. Sexual prevention was more possible than ever and women started to fight for their right to vote. Family and marriage became more important, also for men. Suddenly, families had hobbies and would spend their free times together. The self-conscious woman was the new role model, at least in the bourgeoisie. The first bra was invented after the long period of the corset which has been definitely a

¹² Cabaret – Bob Fosse, Published 1972, USA

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3JFFZ0CoPE>, Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik, Das Jahrhundert der Frauen

torture for most of the women wearing it. Doctors claimed that women wearing corsets tend to have injuries on their organs. Although one could taste the liberation, there were still huge discrepancies between the social classes. Poor families were still stuck in the conditions before and during the war. Poor women could not dance during the night and work in factories. Furthermore, conservative groups – of men AND women – tried to stop the liberal movement, because they were convinced that the old way of seeing family, work and women had to stay the same. The principal social standpoint was still commanding daily life. In TV-soaps women were still the ‘firekeepers’ in the household and it should stay like that. I think, by looking back, one recognizes that liberation and change needs a long time to really happen. Even though, the years after the first world war have been very important for the liberation of the women, they were still the first baby steps. Cheeky female characters – like Marlene Dietrich – became important figures back in those times. Disappointed by the German attitude, she moved to America becoming famous as an actress and singer.¹⁴ Later, she sang for American/English soldiers during and after the second world war. Why do I mention that? Because, once again, a strong female character who became a role model for many women, had been brought into the field of war singing for the soldiers. On the one hand, she used to be so provocative (Song: “Sag mir, wo die Blumen sind”) against society and the war and on the other hand she was singing and pleasing the soldiers. By watching the documentary about her, I got very confused and I am still, I must admit.

In the studio I read the song text of ‘Sag mir wo die Blumen sind’ and tried to improvise with it. Again, I felt that it is so strong to hear a criticism about human behavior from a woman. This song is strongly connected with the war and the disaster that it brought with it.

The years between 1900 and 1950 became very important for my research.

In Marilyn Monroe, I’ve found a sexual role model of the American culture and I wanted to take a closer look at her. Almost every citizen knows her, but I am sure that rarely people know what Marilyn has gone through and what opinions she had. Surely, she was seen and used as THE perfect woman and for sure, she played with it. But she was very critical about it and also about the society which idolized her.¹⁵

In the middle of December, I was more clear about the topic of my solo. I knew now that it was about identity, womanhood, the role of women in the war and the big question of gender.

But how could I combine that or even embody it?

As my choreographic base, I knew that I will use the tools that I have learned from different teachers so far, especially Shai Faran, because I sensed that I could apply the tools in everything that I will find out about movements that I want to follow regarding the topics that I have found.

After an improvised session in the studio, I had the idea of finding words for the different topics that I wanted to work on, so that I could find movement qualities which will be specific and coherent regarding the topics of the solo.

To each words, I wanted to explore different movement qualities and how I could embody them.

After time, I summarized them into more general topics so that I could contain all of them in a wider sense in my body.

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FHQvz2fnPw>, Marlene Dietrich, Her own Song (Dokumentation in voller Länge)

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BL0JTzkhOmQ>, The Marilyn Monroe Story

- In meinen Demo-Burlesque-Saal-Tanz-Raum einladen (um mich herumstehen)
- Freiheits-Absteiger: Wischnops, Make up, Lockenwickler, Playboy-Magazine, Stöckelschuhe, BH's
- Meinen BH ausziehen? Am Ende? Kokett? früher: Befreiung vom Korsett
- Brustverbesserer: Gestell aus Draht & Seide
- Befreiung von der Unterdrückung - Tjaja, ist das gut?

SOLO		
Thema	Mechanik	
• Stärke	1	• Freude
• Fragilität	1	• Lust
• Befreiung	1	• Aushalten
• Unterdrückung	1	• Mütterlichkeit
• Erotik	1	• Sensibilität
• Verführung	1	• Mitgefühl
• Präsenz	1	• Eine Rolle haben/einnehmen
• Berührung	1	• Empfangen - Receive
		• Behüten / Pflegen
		• Körpersensibilität

• Stärke: • Muskeln (hoher Muskeltonus)
• Stehend
• etwas „tragen“

• Fragilität: • „kleine“ Bewegungen
• Verletzlichkeit • Augen zu?
• Durchlässigkeit

• Befreiung: • ohne Last - Schulterrolle - Fühflapp
• Leichtigkeit - Boden Rosete

• Unterdrückung: • gebeugt
• schwer zu stehen
• Kopf abwenden
• Am Boden

• Erotik: • Knieen
• Bück präsent
• Brust nach vorne } Anmut

• Verführung: • Blick
• Körper in den Mittelpunkt stellen

• Präsenz: • Blick
• Fülle

• Berührung: • Etwas berührt etwas Anderes (Boden, Publikum)
• Sensuell

• Feuer: • zerstören: Muskeln/Haut
• Von unten nach oben
• Einnehmen

• Aushalten: • Luft anhalten → Jmd. im Publikum tragen, ob er nur den Brustkorb zuhalten kann (Korsett)
• Steif
• Nicht in voller Kraft

• Mütterlichkeit: • halten
• Aufmerksamkeit
• Liebe

• Sensibilität: • Weich } kleine, sichere Bewegungen

Now I had three different parts that I wanted to work on.

1. Burlesque/Cabaret
2. Xtravaganza/Text/Character/Gender/Identity
3. Liberation/War/Womanhood/Feminism (Words)

Pose 1
 F { I would like to be a spoiled rich white girl (laugh)
 They get what they want
 Whenever they want it and
 They don't really have to struggle
 Pose 2
 M { With finances and nice things, nice clothes and
 They don't have to have that as a problem
 Pose 3 M
 M { The thing that helped me make my most money through the escort service
 Is being that I am so little, I'm so petite and tiny
 Pose 4
 F { Ahm, the blond hair and the light skin, the green eyes
 Quite later on this evening I'm supposed to meet someone, a friend of mine
 A very good old friend of mine
 He's a young very good attractive handsome young man
 And ahm, he's takin me out to dinner
 Later on this evening
 Or for Cocktails
 After Midnight
 I know he'll give me some money
 That's for me to maybe buy a pair of shoes and
 A nice dress
 So that the next time he sees me
 He'll see me looking more and more beautiful
 The way he wants to see me
 Pose 5
 M { Bein auf stuhl
 Pose 6
 F { H
 Pose 7
 F { umdrehen,
 Beine über Kreuz,
 über Schulter gucken,
 Arsch raus
 Pose 8
 F { If you married a woman
 In the suburb
 A regular woman
 Is married to her husband
 Pose 9
 F { And she wants him to buy her
 A washer and dryer set
 In order for him to buy that
 I'm sure she'd had to go to bed with him anyway
 To give him what he wants
 For her to get what she wants
 So... in the long run, it all ends up the same way
 Pose 10
 M { I want a car
 I wanna be with the man I love
 I want a nice home
 Away from New York
 Up the peak skills or maybe in Florida
 Or somewhere far where no one knows me
 Pose 11
 F { I wanna get married in church in white
 I wanna be a complete woman
 And I wanna be a professional model behind cameras
 In a high fashion world
 I want this, this is what I want
 And I'm gonna go for it
 Entdecken?
 Extremer?
 Banana or shirt in a plastic tube

Literally, also in movement, I worked on those three different chapters which still felt quite far apart from each other.

Natacha insisted on the questions that I mentioned above about the catwalk that I did in October 2017, because she said that this could be very important to find the seed of my movement quality and finally also the dispositif that I would like to have in the end. Quite early, she mentioned the

word 'dispositif'. Thus, quite early, I was already busy by asking myself how I would like to set the piece in the end and how I would like to interact with the audience, what role I want to give them etc.

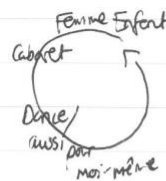
Spontaneously, I've set a vague structure and asked Cheryl (Promo C) if she could come and watch. It was the first time that I showed a vague Idea of the solo. I used the 'Pink Panther Theme' as my Burlesque music, dancing on high heels and wearing erotic clothes. In the second part, I lipsinked the voice of Xtravaganza and changed the costume into a male suit. In the third part, I went through the words that I had found out about womanhood etc and improvised by applying the qualities that I had found regarding the words.

Unconsciously connecting to what Natacha kept insisting on, Cheryl asked me the same question: "Everything is nice, but, tell me, what was the seed of all this? Especially the part when you are dancing on high heels... this could be more radical"

I felt that now, the intense studio research would start. I wanted to find more 'radical' and more honest ways of embodying what I had found.

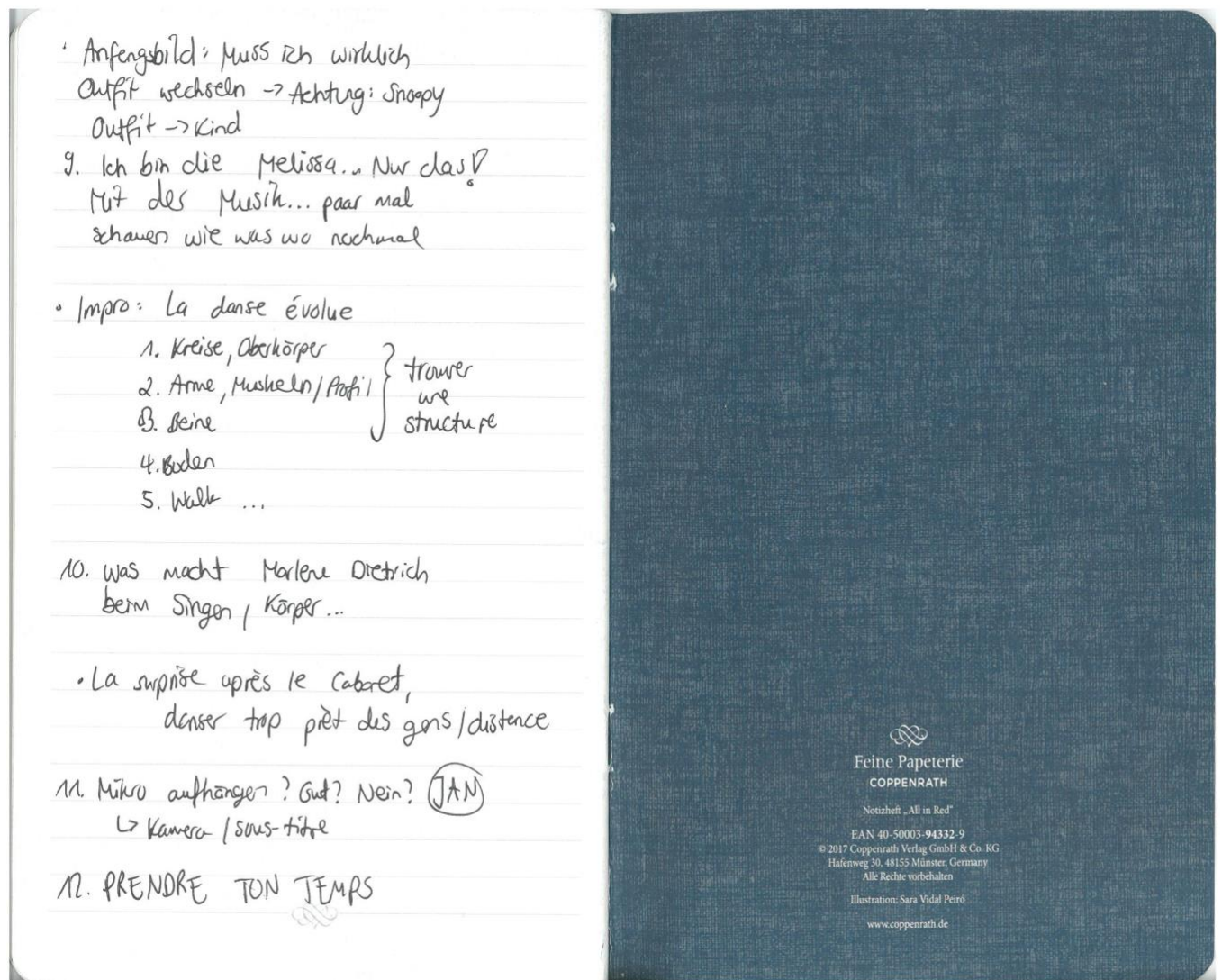
- pure autre version (live / enregistré)
1. Stimme am Anfang (nicht so deutlich)
→ putzen den Sound → Sous-titres ? → Jan ?
 2. Text länger schreiben / Jan Musik Hey Mister. ^{à qui je dis.}
 3. Auf Kamera aufnehmen: mich schminken, ^{je suis déjà en place.}
aber auf der Bühne schminke ich mich nicht
 4. Socken nicht aufsehen
 5. Musikname finden?
 6. Mehr Zeit für Marlene Dietrich
→ Viel langsamer (Am Ende)
 7. Mich aufnehmen statt Xtravaganza
(oder selbst sagen während ich mich schminke) → Kamera → Jan ?
→ Maline Export
 8. Cabaret-part: Vraiment adresser
 - 9. Wie soll das Publikum sein? Unsicher? ^{hier je suis déjà en place.}
• Image de la lutte / violence / corps soldat ^{hier je suis déjà en place.}
de la femme ^{hier je suis déjà en place.}
 - seduction / violence / puissance
 - Début: plus long / image cabaret ^{vraiment installer le temps de comprendre}
→ peu à peu sensuel → combat
 - ambiance cinématographique / parker / seduction,
→ détacher après / mais contact toujours avec le public

- comment tracer le lien entre cabaret et musique
- zuerst fémininité, dann mit Musik: "Kill Bill"
 - wie ist das, zuerst ich femme enfant, séduire, chemise de nuit, dann danse de combat (guerre?), c'est quoi ton combat / la force dans les deux trucs / creuser cette parallèle
 - Warum ist die
 - Violence / sensualité en même temps la force reste
 - l'enfant qui veut être femme



(histoire de combat, c'est plus pour le public, c'est pour moi, où je décroche le regard)

- CREUSER ?
la puissance, la sensualité, le trouble, les pistes



Next to further reading about women in the 20s and 70s, the role of women in war and more general gender questions, I focused now more intensively on my movement.

For the first part, I just put on high heels and started dancing and walking in them. The most natural way that I could find out for my body. I was aware that I was working on a huge topic and it all goes through the zoom-in of my body and its expression.

Quite quickly, I found a mixture of wavy qualities (Shai – closed and open chain) which my body found almost on its own - and the rupture of it. I found out that I want to break the wavy quality - which resembled some kind of a pole dance – with a more dense and muscular quality of movement. Thus naturally, I developed a mixture of feminine and more masculine qualities.

It felt quite organic for me and I was happy for what I have found.

I had a little 'click'-moment when I decided not to put the high heel part into a fixed form but rather improvise with it and see what comes out of it.

This was my first big proof that somehow the solo process will unfold in its own time and way.

Furthermore, the second part kept my mind being a bit worried. I knew that I want to work on the character of Xtravaganza and her voice. But sitting on a chair just lipsinking her voice felt a bit superficial. I watched the interview again trying to incorporate her character, but still trying to build a relationship between me and her. What did we have in common? What was different?

By thinking about those questions, the topic of the 'comfort zone' came up.

Her comfort zone:

Talking

'Reading' ("It has nothing to do with books! It's the witty, catty art form of the insult. Described as when 'everyone kiks because you found a flaw and exaggerated it – then you've got a good read going".)

'Shade' ("This is when you let somebody know, unequivocally, that you strongly disapprove of them through 'giving them an evil [look]'. Described in the documentary as 'I don't need to tell you you're ugly, because you already know".)

Acting, Playing

My comfort zone:

Moving

Dancing

Improvising

My conclusion was: I have to mix that. And how? By finding a specific attitude.

It might be something more internal than external. Something subtle that challenges my own little comfort zone.

This is where I started to look for male and female postures on a chair which can be seen as typical regarding the given gender. I wanted to find a mixture of her body language and also vocal language and mine.

At this point, I want to mention a piece by Eszter Salamon which is called 'Reproduction'¹⁶:

"This choreography shows in a very brilliant, let's say « tender-troubling » way, the scores of gaze-regimes. As a reflection on how we constitute bodies merely by perceiving them in a certain manner, this work generates floating bodies, which can no longer be fixed to one single identity.

The main score consists in repetition and a simple formation of bodies, accessoires, costumes, motion and touch. But while reproducing scenes of intimacy, scenes of touch, scenes of love, and letting them last, the (voyeurist) audience assists another spectacle, which defigures the physical borderlines we used to see."



¹⁶ <http://www.eszter-salamon.com/WWW/repro.htm>

What inspired me was the fact that she played a lot with the eye of the spectator. She blurs the borders between genders and questions the symbolic portrayal of men and women in the society. And this is what I was looking for in my own way.

Also in the third part (the parts were still quite separate from each other), I played with some culturally given terms which described some views on women in society. Matching this approach, I looked for more cliché-movements of a female body and the total opposite of it.

III. Realness/Butch Queen – Aka: Embodiment/Structure

What kind of music? How do I structure it? What do I want to keep and fix? Am I satisfied with what I have? What do I want? How can I situate what I do? I still have to dig deeper.

Those questions kept coming back after I had found the vague structure of the piece.

When I look back, I think I had a little – really very little – crisis in the end of December/beginning of January, because I felt that somehow I have the topics and movements that I want to work on, but I couldn't connect them. In the studio, I worked on the different parts, all the time separately.

Sometimes, in the beginning of a session, I would have to just put some music and to dance, because it felt that my body got already a bit rusty by just digging deeper into specific qualities.

Parallely, I became more clear about my title. I knew that I want to call my piece 'Memphis Belle'.

I stumbled over this name already quite early when I read about Pin up Girls, Burlesque and Cabaret. I insisted on keeping the title, because I liked the idea of combining – even in a subtle way – the topic of transsexuality/gender questions and the role of women in the war. Because war – this is what I've found out by reading different texts – was (and still is, but it is changing) the situation in which the two gender were separated in the clearest way. I found it very pervert that Bombardier Airplanes in the second world war had been named by pin up girls created in the beginning of the 20th century.

“In 1895, Life Magazine illustrator Charles Dana Gibson forever changed the future of women's fashion with images of what he saw as the personification of the feminine ideal of beauty. The renderings of well-endowed women with hourglass figures and full lips became known as the Gibson Girl, which Gibson considered to be the composite of “thousands of American Girls.” The pictures would run in the pages of Life Magazine for the next 20 years, and would inspire countless imitators. As printing technology made gains, more and more magazines featured images of this unattainable idealistic beauty. For the first time in the United States, men had an easily attainable source of feminine fantasy at their fingertips. (...) What would become the familiar pin-up began to take shape in 1917, when the Wilson administration created the Division of Pictorial Publicity during World War One. The division mobilized all media outlets in the creation of propaganda that would further the US war effort. Sex, sells, after all; and in the early 20th century, the US made it so that it would recruit, too. When men returned from the War, the women of the Roaring Twenties were not willing to surrender the freedom they had acquired while their husbands were away. Combine this



with the overall atmosphere of rebellion that helped define the Prohibition period, and increasingly-revealing clothing mirrored an ever-opening society. Calendar artists followed and helped shape these changes in dress and attitude: over time, the woman's pin-up became much more teasing and flirtatious. Following the Division of Pictorial Publicity's overwhelming success, it came as little surprise that propaganda efforts would only *increase* as the United States became involved in World War Two. This time around, pin-ups were used in recruitment materials, posters and calendars promoting

the purchase of war bonds. Many considered this to be the pin-up's "Golden Age", and thousands of images were commissioned to raise soldier morale while fighting overseas. A US soldier couldn't really go anywhere without seeing a pin-up girl: pinned in barracks, taped to submarine walls, and carried in pockets – the men of World War Two were never far away from reminders of what they were fighting for."¹⁷



("Why men leave home")

What's worth mentioning regarding this topic is, once again, the picture of THE women made by a patriarchal society. This is also the reason why I wanted to keep the topic as part of my research. Because I think the role of women during wartime is crucial speaking about the role of women and their protest movements in general.

The interesting thing is though that women started to raise their voices by insisting on the fact that they didn't want to leave their working places which they got hold of while the men were fighting in the war (World War 1). Oddly enough, draughtsman used this again to take up this behavior and to fix it in a new idea of the new flirtatious women which can be quite cheeky if you don't pay attention.

"She's risqué but never explicit. She's flirtatious but fiercely independent. She's erotic but always safe for work, a welcome sight for your teenage cousin and prudish mother alike. She's the pin-up girl, an all natural American sweetheart created to win the adoration of men across the country."¹⁸

In Germany at this time, as I mentioned above, women also started to insist on their right to work, their right to vote and generally their right as an equal human being.

But still, a strong conservative force fought against those movements, including women who wanted to keep their exquisite housewifely role.

In the 60s and 70s – a time which also became inspiring for my solo ('Paris is burning' was made in the 70s and was published in 1990) – women seized on the achievements of women in earlier history. Women demonstrated and burned their bras ('Nothing should constrain nature'), their clothes, their shoes and danced naked on the street.

I grinned when I was watching documentaries about these times. It is so refreshing to see women using their juicy joy of life to demonstrate piecefully.

Valie Export became another inspiration for my piece.

¹⁷ <http://allthatsinteresting.com/pin-up-history>, An illustrated history of the pin-up girl, by Erin Kelly, Published April 18, 2015

¹⁸ <http://allthatsinteresting.com/pin-up-history>

Her work seemed very pure and rough and I liked her fearlessness. She didn't seem to be afraid of what society will think about her, no matter what she does. She wanted to be aggressive and provocative in her work so that one can talk about something, one can discuss something afterwards. She wanted to express the real collective experience (especially of women) and not to blur again reality by not going into extremes.

She was not only a rebell or someone who provoked, she also was a brilliant theorist of the actual time in which she was living.¹⁹



On a December-morning I watched a documentary recommended by a friend about a female warrior unit (YPJ) in northern Syria.²⁰ The original 'Miliz' is called PKK/YPG in which only men are fighting. 1/3 of the warriors in northern Syria are women. Mainly, they are fighting against the IS. One woman said that the IS-warriors are afraid of being killed by a woman because they won't get to paradise once they are being killed by female hands. The women use this fear for their fights.

What was interesting to hear is that all those women said that they are fighting two battles in being in the 'Miliz'. The first one is surely to protect their area in the country and the second one is an internal battle. They say in the field, they have the right to raise their voice and to have an opinion which they don't have back in normal life. The roles in 'normal' daily life are still separate. Women have to cook and to take care about the children and their husbands while the men can work and are allowed to participate in political decisions.

Many young girls want to become a member of the unit, because they feel that they will have a safe family and they will not get suppressed. That's why the unit also takes care of younger women who are not yet allowed to go in the field.

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uny3UttbVg>, Valie Export – Ikone und Rebellin

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHWYvbH92Lo>, ORF WELTjournal: Syrien; Kämpferinnen gegen den IS



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It took me one day to arrange my thoughts after watching the documentary. It felt so far from my reality. And at the same time I felt such a strong connection to those women who are so brave and fearless. It confused me that on the one hand women have to go to war to fight for their rights and on the other hand that war is still something so actual in so many countries so that young girls feel more safe in a female warrior unit than at home.

War is a delicate and yet huge topic and I feel unable to argument on it. But also regarding the war, things have changed throughout the past 100 years. There are some books existing about female heroes working and fighting in the war. Since always, women played an important role by becoming nurses or cooks for the injured soldiers.

“The traditional role of women in war is as a victim. Sexual assaults have become a war tactic and the victims often face stigmatization and exclusion.” – Bulgarian EPP Member Mariya Nedelcheva.

“Women don’t want to be called victims, but survivors; they don’t want to be looked down on, they want to be society builders.” – Ms. Rehn.

“The word “soldier” may bring to mind a man in uniform but it actually refers to anyone serving in the military, including women. In recent years, the number of women in the military has steadily increased to more than 200,000, which is about 14.5 percent of those in active duty, according to the Pentagon. However, women have always been part of the war effort, whether directly or indirectly. When men went overseas to war, women often stepped in to fill their vacancies during World War I and II. Women have also been recognized for their medical services to wounded soldiers since Clara Barton nursed soldiers during the Civil War. What many do not realize is that in the past, women have also served in combat, espionage and resistance roles. Next year (2018) marks the 100th anniversary of WWI, which was going to be the “war to end all wars.” As preparations are made to celebrate this event, it is fitting to also recognize women’s contributions.”²²

For me, the topics of gender, transgender and feminism (also regarding the war) are strongly connected.

As I already mentioned, Xtravaganza points out very specific clichés about how a western woman should look like and why she would like to become such a woman. Those clichés don’t come from nowhere. Since a long time, actually since always, women had to have a certain role in society. Often those roles were so clear and inviolable that women didn’t even question those. But even in the dark middle age, women tried to raise their voice, trying to call attention to their needs and bodies. But as soon as they tried to cultivate a certain knowledge, they would have been burned as a witch.

²¹ <http://www.moddb.com/groups/kurdistan/images/ypj-fighter>

²² <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/advertising/primetime/ct-ss-pt-forgotten-history-the-role-of-women-in-war-times-20171101dto-story.html>, Forgotten history: The role of women in war times, Published November 3 2017, Chicago Tribune

That doesn't mean that this knowledge and this quality of femininity had been completely destroyed. Fortunately, there have been and still are women circles, mothers who care for the world and try to capture their knowledge about natural medicine, birth and so much more.

Hildegard von Bingen, Marie Curie, Simone de Beauvoir, Hannah Arendt, Jeanne d'arc and so many more are exemplary enough that women were and are able to assert themselves.

But somehow, I find it even sad that one has to mention those women. It is as if we would have to prove that women can be strong ALSO. Thus, it doesn't seem natural.

After being busy with all those topics and questions, I still felt that I somehow want to embody that in my own way and to find a structure for the piece which feels coherent for me.

IV. Fierce/Work – Aka: Confidence/Building

January.

Since we started a creation with the class, I didn't have so much time for my individual solo work. Nevertheless, I wanted to rehearse during the weekend. My focus was clearly on studio research, structuring the piece and finding a coherence including all the research I had made before.

I was still working on three different parts trying to connect them.

After the Feedback of Cheryl, Natacha and Claire, I really wanted to dig deeper into specific qualities.

At this point, I decided to have the public around me (as my dispositif), because I thought this could fit with especially the third part in which I still considered interacting with the public.

Furthermore, I decided to have music from the 20s-40s, because those times have been so important for my research and also for the liberation of women.

The following things were clear for me:

1. Part: High Heels. Wavy quality with ruptures, blurring the eye of the spectator whether he/she sees a women or a man dancing on high heels. Still feeling the fire that I had felt while doing the catwalk in October.

2.Part: Xtravaganza. Sitting on a chair with high heels, posing in different manners (female and male postures), putting on the suit after lipsinking.

3.Part: Working specifically on the 5 topics/terms/synonyms that I had found out.

- 1. Bearing, Suppression, Receiving, Protecting, Weak

Heavy movements, being close to the floor, falling, breathing is heavy, internal gaze

- 2. Seduction, Erotic, Presence

Standing still in presence, facial expression, smile, curves, searching the eye of the spectator

- 3. Fragility, Touch, Sensitivity, Maternal, Attentive, Compassion

Careful movements, small little changes, softness, closed eyes

- 4. Strength, Fire, Liberation

Dynamic movements, explosive movements, running, jumping

- 5. Playing a Role

Interacting with the audience, going close to someone, lying down next to a man

With this structure, I kept on working until two weeks before the general rehearsal.

Knowing that it is important to have some external eyes, I asked some colleagues from the other

Promos and my Promo if someone could come and watch. They came in my second light and

technical rehearsal. I was very nervous, also because I didn't feel totally confident with the piece yet.

After the run-through, we had a feedback-session of almost one hour.

The main points of critique were that the three parts are still too disconnected and that they had the impression that I wanted to include in the piece everything that I had found to be sure that it will be convincing. Also the interaction with the public in the end didn't work, because it was not really developed. They said that I maybe could reduce drastically and maybe have the public frontal, because the things that I do work better frontally.

I was confused and a bit resigned. I could almost cry because I felt unable to overview my own piece in a manner which can be helpful for me. One day after, I took some time in the studio, but I stared at the ceiling for about an hour and decided to go home. I was blocked.

One day after, I asked Anais from my Promo if we could meet in the studio and talk about our solos, so that we can help each other to find the final design.

Together we found out that it is better to throw away the idea of the interaction, because it was not necessary. Furthermore, I decided to have the public frontal. We came to the idea that I could start with something more pure as my first part than already dancing on high heels. By watching me, Anais came up with the idea to have the first part to introduce the solo and at the same time to contain everything already. To use my comfort zone in a way that uses postures that I will do in the second part (High Heels) but out of context. Means, that I just travel through those postures and apply movement qualities that embody searching, pureness and femininity.

For the second part, I decided to throw away the chair and to connect the high heels directly with the lipsink of the voice of Xtravaganza, because it felt more coherent like that. Because then you could really see that I become someone else by transforming physically and also through my 'voice'.

For the third part, we thought that it might be better not to go through the different terms separately, but to improvise freely by keeping the words in mind.

The improvisation that I do in the third part is thus a mixture of having the terms in mind and applying them in my physicality and movement language that I had developed throughout the past years of my education as a dancer. Hence, I could include my more general interests of movement into the third part.

The day after working with Anais, I showed the new structure to Natacha.

The only thing that she insisted on was the fact that I should really change my gender while I am dancing on high heels. The idea came up once already when I showed her some extracts in Geneva. Because like this, one can really understand that the piece is about gender and transformation and not just about a woman who wants to become rich and beautiful and famous.

I decided to use a penis-protection (in Boxing) for men to transform into a more man-like person.

With this structure and also the fact that I transform to a man or transvestite for a while, I felt much more confident and satisfied. Although I would sometimes wake up in the morning with the thought that my piece is maybe absolutely nonsense, I could trust myself and also the external eyes who encouraged me.

In the week before the premiere, I talked to my mother about the piece who had seen it once when I showed it to a few more people. We discussed about the meaning of the piece and we came to some interesting conclusions:

It is a quest for an own identity and force far from role and cliché. A woman doesn't want to get identified by those roles. I am me and I have my own body. In the moment that I turn myself towards this sexual energy which I felt during the catwalk, it easily seems like just fulfilling a specific type of woman. Where is the feminine identity beyond those clichés? What makes a man wanting to become a woman? My own insecurity is part of the whole thing. If I want to leave it aside, it becomes unauthentic. I don't want to find myself (or women in general) in those roles, so I start to look for something else.

My space. To move away from the clichés and to look what will happen. I don't have to represent something. Leaving the end open. There is no identity which feels secure in such a structure of gender. Because all of the roles, they don't fit. They are just slipped over the complex being of a human, no matter if it describes a male role or a female.

V. Chanté you stay – Aka: Le grand final

Première partie: Je cherche. Je cherche des mouvements qui ne sont pas habituels. Je visite des postures sans contexte. Je porte des habits flashy mais pas extrêmement séduisants. Je montre beaucoup de peau. Un corps d'une femme. Je fais des mouvements techniques. J'essaie d'être pure.

Je fais ça pour moi. Pour les femmes. Je danse sous une lumière douce. Il me semble que je remarque pas qu'il y a de public. Je travaille sur une qualité de recherche. J'ai des cheveux lâchés.

Deuxième partie : Je danse sous une lumière plus forte. Je porte des talons. Je porte encore des habits flashy. Ils deviennent plus séduisants. Il y a un contexte différent. Je danse femelle, mais on peut voir l'homme. On peut voir l'homme après parce que je me transforme. Je parle. Mais pas vraiment. Je deviens Xtravaganza. Xtravaganza parle. Je suis au sol. Je me trouve dans des postures vulgaires. Maintenant, c'est moi qui parle. Avec une voix que je connaissais pas avant. C'est moi ou c'est elle ? Qui suis-je ? Je suis une femme. Ou bien ? Je veux être une femme. Je SUIS une femme. Je m'habille. Je me change. Je porte un veston, un costume. J'attache mes cheveux. Je suis toujours une femme.

Troisième partie: Je danse dans tout l'espace. Je danse dans un costume. Comment trouver la liberté dans mon corps, être celle qui je suis, trouver la joie, trouver la liberté, habillée, libre. Je fais ce que je veux, je fais ce qui me plaît et je cherche pas à vous plaire. Je travaille avec le public. Je danse pour moi. En même temps, on sent que je danse pour vous. L'adresse est très différente, plus ouverte vers l'autre. Le regard de l'autre. Mais garder ma liberté. Puissance. Mouvements contemporains et musique des années 30. Ella Fitzgerald. Une femme magnifique. Joyeux et mélancolique? Revenir à mes mots. Ils peuvent encore exister. Histoire d'enfance. Origine. On peut tout faire dans la liberté. Suivre un modèle et être soi en même temps. La Force. La fragilité dans la force. Je me mets dans les conditions de fragilité sur scène. Mes mouvements sont nourris par mon chemin en tant que danseuse.

J'essaie de contenir les mères, les 'sorcières' qui ont été brûlées, les guerrières, les pin-ups, les activistes, les chanteuses, les théoriciennes, les danseuses, les travestis. La masculinité, la féminité. Les questions. Les chercheuses, les chercheurs.

J'ai un corps dans lequel tout ça est inscrit. En moi, en nous, mon histoire, notre histoire, vit encore et essaie de s'exprimer, de se changer. Par nos corps, les anciennes histoires parlent. Par nos corps, le futur parle. Tout est possible.

On 7th of September 2017, sitting in a café in Spain, I wrote into my notebook:

'Women should maybe analyze how their inner convictions and assumptions are, how they are being treated by men. What does beauty mean? What does femininity mean? What does intimacy and sexuality mean for us women? How do we find to our creative creativity? Are we convinced about the fact that we have to please men? Why do we find ourselves in situations in which we are threatened? How is our relationship to our father/mother? How do we want to live in this world? I believe that the 'problem' is a bigger one. I don't think that there is one evil gender who just wants to bring harm to the other gender. I don't believe that it is just the guilt of men. It is a symptom. This doesn't mean that many actions should be justified by saying 'it is just a symptom'. In all what is happening, everybody has always his or her own responsibility how to react and how to live. I ask myself where it all started and how we – as a society – can integrate our history and change it. Where does our 'mental injury' come from?

Men are not the bad ones. Women are not the bad ones. We have to become more aware of what has happened and what is happening to change it. Because there is no point in now trying to turn the paper around and point the finger towards the evil gender saying they are guilty and responsible for all this harm. Somehow, I think – since we have a free will as human beings – that we misunderstood the fact that men are often muscularly stronger and women are made to give birth. I think if we start – and I think it is already happening bit by bit – to acknowledge that men and women HAVE different capacities and different energies, but that this is not BAD, but NECESSARY for our evolution and that we actually can better CONTRIBUTE together if we become aware of the positive aspect of our differences. Every human being has both sides. The male and the female side. The strong intellectual force and the balancing emotional capacity. If we started to see that and work together and were in

peace with that, we would not abuse our differences but rather bring them together and praise them. We would be equal and respectful towards each other.'

I don't really have answers to all those questions. I am just thinking that, already in early ages, before religion, before the bible, men took care of hunting and bringing food and women stayed in their homes to take care about the children. But as I mentioned above, this is not the basic problem in my opinion. We misunderstood that and then history took its course.

As Simone de Beauvoir says: 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.', I could say the same for men. Because 'everything we are is the result of choices, as we build ourselves out of our own resources and those which society gives us.'

'In *The Second Sex*, her most famous work, de Beauvoir sketches a kind of existential history of a woman's life: a story of how a woman's attitude towards her body and bodily functions changes over the years, and of how society influences this attitude. Here de Beauvoir raises the core question of female embodiment: Are the supposed disadvantages of the female body *actual* disadvantages which exist objectively in all societies, or are they merely *judged* to be disadvantages by our society? She answers this question by exploring case studies of the various stages of female life. In these case studies the female body is presented as both positive and negative, and women as both oppressed and free. A woman's body is the site of this ambiguity, for she can use it as a vehicle for her freedom *and* feel oppressed by it. There is no essential truth of the matter: it depends upon the extent to which a woman sees herself as a free subject rather than as the object of society's gaze.

Sartre observed that whatever we perceive, including other people, is rendered as an 'object' to our gaze and is *defined* by us. De Beauvoir takes up this idea and applies it to men's perception of women. The very concept of 'woman', de Beauvoir argues, is a male concept: woman is always 'other' because the male is the 'seer': he is the subject and she the object – the *meaning* of what it is to be a woman is given by men.'²³

I agree with de Beauvoir to the extent that she is saying that our attitude and how we see ourselves changes also because of the status quo of our society. We want to become thinner, because this is how women should look like. We want to become more muscular, because this is how men should look like. Regarding to what I was mentioning in my notebook entry, I don't believe that women are disadvantaged by their bodies. What I find interesting is when she writes that there is this ambiguity in femininity and that there is no actual truth. This is relevant for both genders in my opinion. It is all about our culture and how we perceive and set up things.

In my Solo, I wanted to bring up this ambiguity. On the one hand, I as a woman can feel totally free and pure in my dancing, in my body, exposed to an audience. Then, as soon as I wear High Heels, a specific stereotype is provoked in the viewers eye. I myself, I feel very strong by dancing on High Heels, I feel sexy and seductive. At the same time, I could feel a certain fragility because from the outside, this can be used as an invitation for abuse, for sexual harassment. Natacha once asked me if I would do the catwalk in public that I did in October during the Voguing ball. I widened my eyes and said: NO. She asked me why. And then I realized that I would never do this Catwalk because it is dangerous to do it in public, just on the street. Because my body would be considered as a sexual object. No matter how I felt and how my relationship to my body was in this moment - from the outside, it can be taken up in bad manners.

And then – what about if I even blur the borders between being feminine but becoming masculine. How will my body be perceived? Interestingly, Xtravaganza has this specific picture of a woman that she would like to become. In my opinion, she was more looking for the objectification of women. ((...)) 'I know he'll give me some money. That's for me to maybe buy a pair of shoes and a nice dress, so that the next time he sees me, he'll see me looking more and more beautiful. The way he wants to see me. (...) She wants him to buy her a washer and dryer set. In order for him to buy that, I'm sure

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https://philosophynow.org/issues/69/Becoming_A_Woman_Simone_de_Beauvoir_on_Female_Embodiment,
Becoming a Woman: Simone de Beauvoir on female embodiment, Published 2008 by Felicity Joseph

she'd had to go to bed with him anyway to give him what he wants, for her to get what she wants. So... in the long run, it all ends up the same way.')

I disagree with de Beauvoir saying that she considers the men as 'seers' and the women as the 'perceived'. I do think that this is true to a certain extent (because of history and given reasons), but it is also the woman herself who sees herself like that and gives meaning to herself and is not aware of it.

I think, what happened in the 20s and then even stronger in the 70s, is that women started to become aware of this fact and wanted to liberate themselves from that cage they've found themselves in. And I do think that those movements, until nowadays, were and are extremely important for society to wake up.

But, as I already mentioned, in both ways. We can not stand up and say: Women should have all the power over this planet. We have to acknowledge both qualities; female and male. Indeed, I think that if more women took part in important decisions regarding politics, war and environmental issues, the world would look quite different, because the nature of the feminine is more of a balancing, peaceful nature.

Coming back to the topic of origin, I would like to quote Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who wrote a book called 'We should all be feminists'.

In her book, she describes her experience of being and becoming a feminist and how this word became very charged by many prejudices.

" Anyway, since feminism was un-African, I decided I would now call myself a Happy African Feminist. Then a dear friend told me that calling myself a feminist meant that I hated men, So I decided I would now be a Happy African Feminist who does not hate men and who likes to wear lipgloss and high heels for herself and not for men. Of course much of this was tongue-in- cheek, but what it shows is how that word feminist is so heavy with baggage, negative baggage: you hate men, you hate bras, you hate African culture, you think women should always be in charge, you don't wear make-up, you don't shave, you're always angry, you don't have a sense of humour, you don't use deodorant.

(...) If we do something over and over again, it becomes normal. (...) If we keep seeing only men as heads of corporations, it starts to seem natural that only men should be heads of corporations. (...)

So in a literal way, men rule the world. This made sense – a thousand years ago. Because human beings lived then in a world in which physical strength was the most important attribute for survival; the physically stronger person was more likely to lead. And men in general are physically stronger. (There are of course many exceptions.) Today, we live in a vastly different world. The person more qualified to lead is not the physically stronger person. It is the more intelligent, the more knowledgeable, the more creative, more innovative. And there are no hormones for those attributes. A man is likely as a woman to be intelligent, innovative, creative. We have evolved. But our ideas of gender have not evolved very much.

(...) Gender matters everywhere in the world. And I would like today to ask that we should begin to dream about and plan for a different world. A fairer world. A world of happier men and happier women who are truer to themselves. And this is how to start: we must raise our daughters differently. We must raise our sons differently.

The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are. (We praise girls for virginity but we don't praise boys for virginity. We teach girls shame and not to say what they really think. We teach boys not to cry and to be strong and 'manly'.)

(...) Some people ask, 'Why the word feminist? Why not just say you are a believer in human rights, or something like that?' Because that would be dishonest. Feminism is, of course, part of human rights in general – but to choose to use the vague expression human rights is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender. It would be a way of pretending that it was not women who have, for centuries, been excluded. It would be a way of denying that the problem of gender targets women. That the problem was not about being human, but being a female human.

(...) What is the point of culture? Culture functions ultimately to ensure the preservation and continuity of a people. (...) Culture does not make people. People make culture. If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture.”²⁴

Xtravaganza, in a wide sense, embodies many things that I wrote about in the last chapters. She used to be a man, but couldn't connect to the way that men should be or look like. She wanted to become a woman. But the image of the perfect woman which she had in mind, was the image that is made by our culture and the history of gender. She gets murdered, because her whole being is considered as something abnormal and threatening.

I think, when I somehow got to the topic of origin after listening to the tape that I had recorded when I was a little girl, I did not realize how big this topic actually will become for me. Then, after I started my research, I realized quite quickly that I am coping with a topic which is something so actual and historical at the same time. By reading the words of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, I interpret the deeper meaning as something which in its essence, is about origin. The origin of human kind, the origin of where we all come from and that we are all equal in our essence. Essence is a synonym for origin. Making a culture in which we teach girls and boys their equality means that their origin, their growing up will be more aware, more fair and more healthy.

²⁴ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – We should all be feminists, Published 2014, Great Britain, by Fourth Estate

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