

playbill

ACT VVIIVIII

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Martha Jager and Isabelle Sully

ESSAY <u>Singularity, Voice and Artwork</u> Katy Deepwell
AUDIENCE REPORTS
ACT V: Anna Daučíková & Helena Jiskrová June 9, 2023
Featuring a screening of a film by Anna Daučíková accompanied by the furniture of Helena Jiskrová
Report by Robert Milne
ACT VI: Sarah Schulman August 25, 2023
Featuring a performative reading of a play by Sarah Schulman with dramaturgy and direction by Szymon Adamczak, performed by Ira Brand, Coen Bril, Devika Chotoe, Thalia Livingstone, Emma van Meijeren and Yulia Ratman
Report by Megan Hoetger
ACT VII: Open Stage December 16, 2023
Featuring performances by Sam Cottington, Toon Fibbe and Bryony Gillard, plus the launch of playbill's first Annual Report publication
Report by Szymon Adamczak
ACT VIII: Hetty Huisman March 19, 2024
Featuring a screening of a film by Hetty Huisman
Report by Clara Amaral
ARTIST COMMISSION: ANNUAL BUDGET Rechonski
ON OUR DESK: THOUGHTS FOR THE COMING YEAR
COLOPHON

As mentioned in our first annual report, when we started playbill in 2022 we were guided by an urge to address the lack of presentation platforms for language- and text-based practices in the Netherlands at the time. Effectively, as both artist-curators busy with this field of making and as audience members invested in it, we wanted to provide possibilities for the amplification of voices we felt weren't getting heard as often or as loudly as they should be.

In writing this as a fullstop and corresponding line break underscoring our second year of activities—say, paragraph two of a larger and evolving essay—it's immediately evident how the project has already begun to take on a different shape. As our annual report readers might know from the previous issues, plans quickly moved on from a one-off event to a year-long program to an ongoing series and, as we planned for the 2023–24 season, our talks about the artistic direction of the platform got supplemented with thinking through durational and sustainable ways of working. We wanted to solidify and ultimately safeguard the founding aims of playbill—to remain scaled, intimate and experimental— within a cultural climate (and corresponding funding agenda) that fetishises growth.

Much like the first season, this second one was produced with one-off grants, scrounging together what we needed to present an artistic program in tandem with remaining dedicated to good practice. Although working in this way comes with a lot of freedom, it also makes it difficult to plan ahead and provide concrete commitments to valuing the work that is being done, not only that of the artists we work with but also of the playbill team. Therefore, in late 2023, in a slight flurry so as to be on time for the much anticipated structural grant applications—for which legal registration is mandatory—we signed the papers for

- 'Stichting playbill' and officially became a foundation. As article two of the deed reads:
- 2.1. The foundation: presents experimental text- and language-based art practices, and introduces an audience to experimental text- and language-based art practices, all in the broadest sense of the word.
- 2.2. The foundation achieves this goal, among other things, by:
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- a. exhibiting art, in which text and language are central;
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.....
- b. publishing articles in (a) magazine(s) and/or other visually oriented mediums;
.....
.....
- c. organizing (cultural) events, activities and/or meetings;
.....
.....
- d. providing information about the activities of the foundation, including by using the various available forms of media;
.....
.....
- e. collaborating with various relevant organisations and institutions;
.....
.....
- f. providing advice and/or guidance;
.....
.....

Off the back of such formalisations come other organsational shifts, which, in the spirit of an annual report introduction, we're proud to detail here. Firstly, we're incredibly honoured to share that in the coming years Stichting playbill will be supported by a board of experts who will ensure we remain loyal to playbill's core values, strengthening them in turn. With great excitement we welcome and introduce Judith Vrancken (chair), Emma van Meyeren (treasurer), Roos Gortzak, Inas Halabi and Mayra A. Rodríguez Castro, who together represent the intersecting disciplines central to playbill's program: theatre and dance, literature, visual art, filmmaking and poetry. We could not be happier to have them on board and look forward to further developing playbill in dialogue with them. Welcome!

We're additionally nothing short of relieved to share that playbill will be again supported in 2025 and 2026 by the aforementioned structural funding, specifically by the Mondriaan Fonds Kunstpodium Basis grant. It begs mentioning that this grant category in particular took a major reshuffle this year, being doubled in both length of grant (from one year to two years) and amount (from €25,000 to €50,000 annually)—a huge opportunity for recipients to establish proper working methods, but a blow for the field at large given there is far less money to actually go around. From a pro-choice play by activist and writer Sarah Schulman to an exhaustingly long and incremental film by Hetty Huisman to Anna Daučíková's insistence on standing her ground within patriarchal institutions, this year's program is indebted to assertions of duration and resistance within structures of limitation. If something can be drawn from this that might fuel the uphill battle we have as a field when it comes to the status of cultural funding in the country, then *perseverance* is surely the word.

And with the professionalisation mandate hot on our heels, it begs mentioning that we have grown up in one other organisational way as well: with great excitement we can now refer you to our new website www.playbill.site, developed by Maud Vervenne in dialogue with Ronja Andersen. All previously published materials are available for free download and you can also sign up for our newsletter, through which news will always find its way to you.

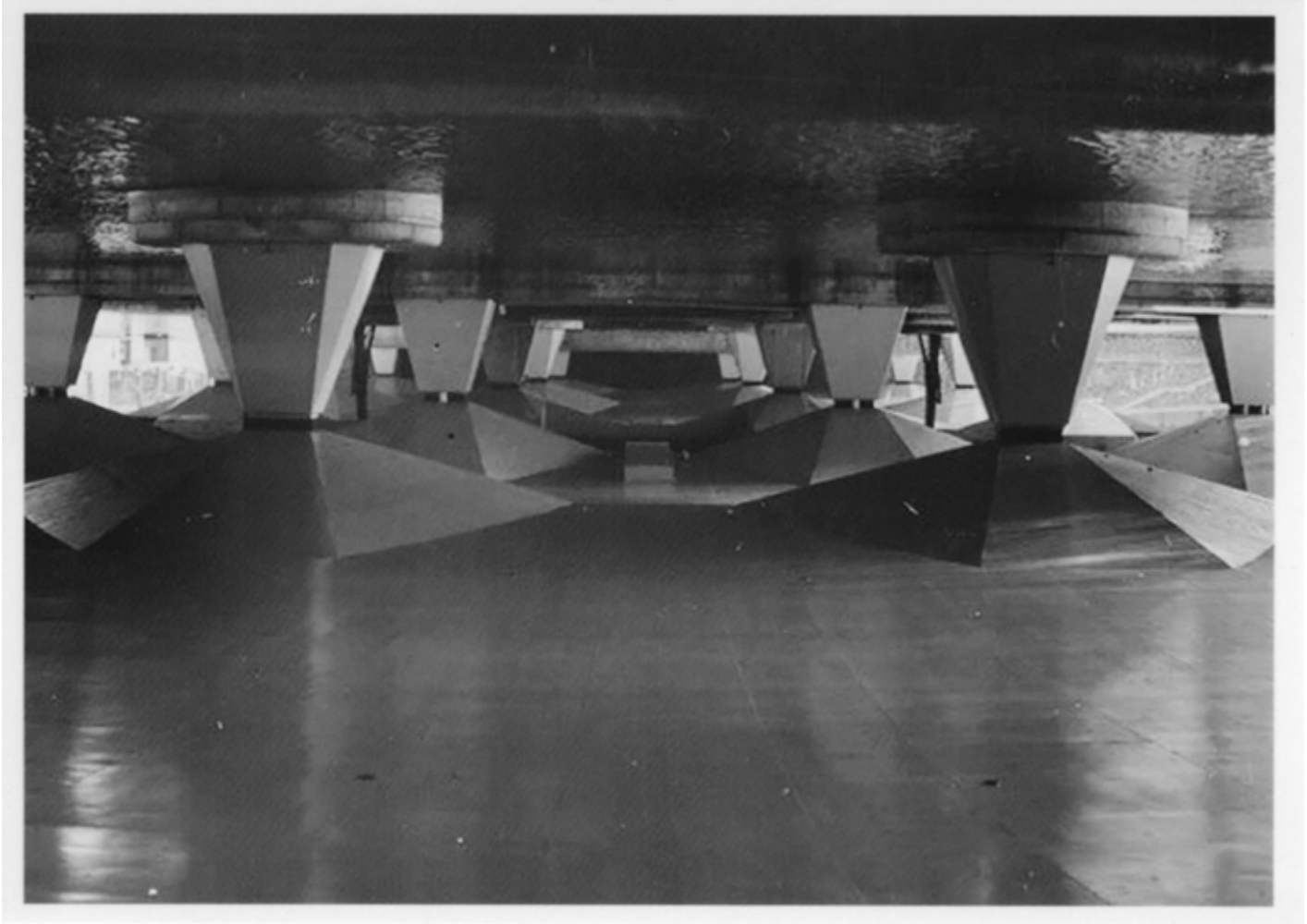
We end this season with a big thank you to everyone who's joined us: to the artists, writers and archivists who take on our invitations, to the team of Torpedo Theater who always make us feel at home and to you, the audience, for sitting in the stiff wooden chairs or on make-shift foam pillows, endlessly alert and similarly convinced by the importance of staging acts of resistance—however humble the theatre in question may be.

ON OUR DESK: THOUGHTS FOR THE COMING YEAR1/4

PLAYBILL IS LOOKING FOR
A GROUND FLOOR OFFICE SPACE

AMSTERDAM

MAX. €800 P/M





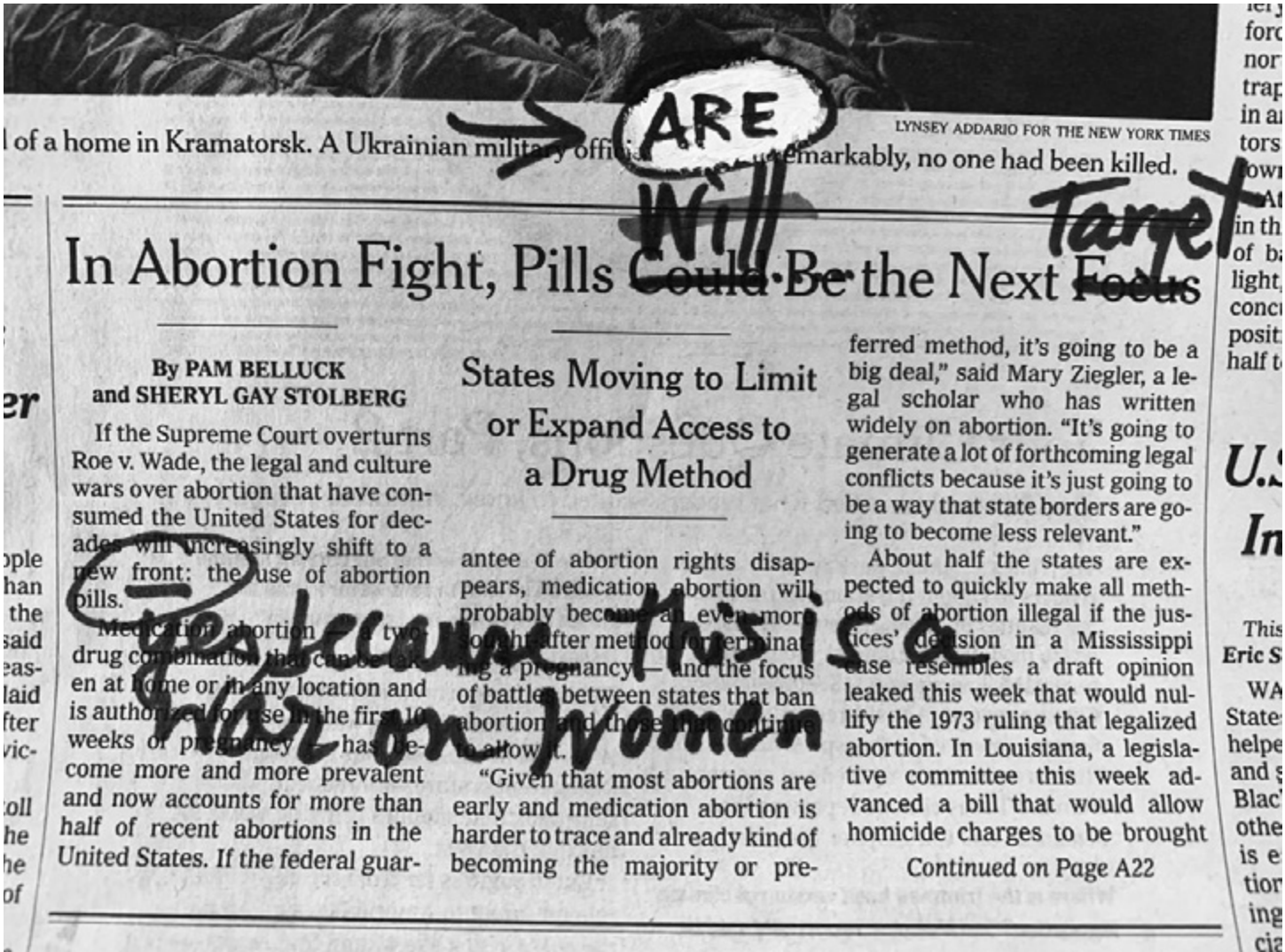
What stays with me is Helena's description of the underside of the Torontobrug, a bridge near her house in Amsterdam, as a 'broken cellar vault'. This visual description could also be considered as a metaphor for the school she taught at in Aachen, and simultaneously reveals her unique perspective towards architecture and the city. My intention is to follow Helena's lead in promoting a new way of looking and seeing.

The woman in the waiting room reached over, grabbed my hand and squeezed it. Looking right into my eyes she said, ‘Don’t cry. It will be fine. This is the way it has got to be. I have four kids at home. My husband doesn’t know I’m here, but we can’t afford another.’ I just looked at her. I didn’t know what to say. I think she probably didn’t expect a response. She didn’t say anything else, but she did keep holding my hand until they called her name and she left the waiting room. I think she may have needed a hand to hold too. I was more than happy to sit there with her, holding hands. I was, in fact, grateful for it. Connected in such an embrace, we did not have to be alone.

*

About twenty years after that day in the waiting room and one year after Roe versus Wade was disastrously overturned by the United States Supreme Court, I entered the Torpedo Theater. I arrived a bit late, and so I took a seat in one of the chairs that had been placed on the stage. The stage was no longer a stage though; under the direction of theatre-maker Szymon Adamczak, the script-reading moved around the micro-theater and between audience members. We were all on the stage and implicated in the epic drama of Sarah Schulman’s *A Mirror is Not a Window*. Staying inside of Schulman’s recounting of the lives of the two women involved in the historic 1973 ruling was difficult. I’m from a working-class family in California, and, unlike in Europe, ‘working class’ in the U.S. essentially means ‘living poor’. Jane’s story in those early years is the story of so many women from my youth, including my own. This is not history or a distant activist battle, and I wonder for whom else the reading that night in Amsterdam offered forth a space where their living grief could find a temporary home.

Megan Hoetger
Berlin, February 24, 2025



Edits to *The New York Times* by artist Mira Schor, posted regularly to her Instagram, this one from May 6, 2022.

Poetry is recited; a diary is read or a document quoted; the lines of a play are performed; songs are sung again in public; a voiceover is heard on a film: echoes, repetitions, reverberating sounds remain. These artforms as we experience them—in film or live performances—construct how and whose voices are heard as much as they present a manner of speaking. How do we understand these voices beyond what they say as content or assessing that they are ‘convincing’, ‘believable’ or ‘true’? Can we draw out how an artwork produces for its audience, through a voice speaking, a palpable individual physical and material sense of another, with recognition and comprehension of an idea, a message or actions/activity in the world? This switch from voice (vocality’s ontology) to the ideas behind speaking (politics) has been redefined by Adriana Cavarero.¹ Insistent on the uniqueness and irreducible embodied materiality of a voice, she asks us to rethink the privileging of the *semantike* over *phone*, mind over body, to argue for a politics of the voice that disrupts the ‘devocalisation of Logos’ and in which the actions of many ‘ones’ speaking offer new kinds of resonances and different kinds of genealogy within the relations between ontology and politics.

Too often voice is used to refer to only the artist/director’s perspective as if they alone stand behind the artwork’s communication to its audience. Perhaps this is Logos at work or just a critical shortcut to identifying art as a singular and unique contribution, even when the artwork’s force is enmeshed within the viewer’s identifications, their awareness of a plurality of codes, genres, modes of address, methods and styles of making in

which this ‘voice’ is formed. This illusion of transparency, of the artists’ meaning delivered directly to the audience in an instant identification or direct communication, is the problem that most contemporary art investigates today when it produces or challenges the norms of existent artistic practices.

Art does not reproduce but problematises how we see the world and very different visions of it, but even in diverse expressions, there remains a hierarchy of norms and values. If we listen, we (the audience) willingly translate the tension in this representation of being in the world within sensory matter into politics as perspectives, or even social and historical constructions on reality. This includes perception of experiences we may not have felt or known, which we try to understand in someone else’s voice: others in different possible worlds. This is what listening to the voices prompted by our engagement instigates in us: a listening which gives way to thought and to grasping how and what we see, hear and feel has come into being. Art’s value lies in hearing different voices speak. Any sense of a direct expression, authenticity or a truth is not made on the basis of belonging to a gender, race, sexuality or ideology alone: these ‘backgrounds’ constantly unfold in unexpected and highly disruptive ways in art through diverse speech and modes of address. This diversity is needed to ensure the full range of human experience in the world has visibility. The odds seem so ridiculously stacked against this, given the spaces where the diverse producers, or consumers, can really be heard, in the sense of presented and represented.

As Birgit Jürgenssen argued in April 1974: ‘Woman is so often the object of art. She is seldom and only reluctantly permitted to speak or portray herself.’² Curator Gabriele Schor uses this quote to highlight how the objectification of women in our culture—as sexually available objects for other people’s visual pleasure or as signs of beauty—led to this artist’s struggle and her visual experiments in refiguring women’s images where her self-affirmation was linked to feminist protests and across many differences, repetitions and transgressions of cultural codes in a search for new forms of identity.

Much has changed since 1974, but this contrast between Woman as idealised figure and diverse women’s voices as real social and historical individuals possessing distinct and clear perspectives on life (as well as creativity) has not. Even if there has been an international shift in museum policy in the last twenty years, towards more mainstream attention to the works of women artists, very limited ideas about the practices of women artists have achieved widespread and popular acceptance. Feminism is still the name for the generic argument that women’s voices need to be heard globally and internationally, for their cultural expression to be registered as significant, and given visibility. Their unique and individual voices offer something that is often contrary to received opinion and disrupts dominant norms of Eurologocentrism. This is why feminism remains the name for an ongoing process of questioning, experiments, refusals and interventions informing the creativity of women and against the idealisation of Woman.

Who is listening? Who is giving space for these alternative critical

realities for women artists to be shown? When we speak of voice or the speech of women, do we recognise who is speaking? Not a generic feminine principle nor idealised Woman (whose counterpoint is always masculinity or male genius), but individual women, each with their own singularity, their own voices on being and politics, the real and its representations?

This season of playbill reminds us to keep this door open.

NOTES

¹ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (2003, English edition, Stanford University Press, 2005)

² This quote is from a letter to Dumont Publishers, sent to argue for a monograph on her work. G. Schor, ‘I am! On the flux of artistic self in the works of Birgit Jürgenssen,’ in G. Schor and Abigail Solomon-Godeau (ed), *Birgit Jürgenssen* (Hatje Cantz, 2009). It was recently used as a museum label in *Vital Signs: Artists and Body* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, November 3, 2024–February 24, 2025).



I am seated in a now demolished theatre, looking upon the empty scene of a long forgotten performance as numbers, letters and symbols from another time dri



lift gently down onto the stage.

****PROMPT**** GENERATE AN IMAGE OF A SPECTATOR WHO LOOKS LIKE SZYMON ADAMCZAK HOLDING A PLAYBILL PROGRAM, SITTING IN THE THEATRE AND WATCHING A LIVE PERFORMANCE BY FEMALE VISUAL ARTIST BRYONY GILLARD. THE PROGRAM HOLDS THE TITLE OF THE PERFORMANCE, THE AUTHOR'S NAME AND THE TEXT: 'THE AUDIENCE REPORT'. BRYONY'S PIECE IS CALLED 'ALONG COMES TERRA' AND IT IS ABOUT A WOMAN DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER AND THE STORYTELLING IS REPRESENTED BY AI GENERATED IMAGES. PICTURE BRYONY PRESENTING THE SLIDESHOW IN THE SMALLEST THEATRE IN AMSTERDAM, CALLED TORPEDO THEATER. IT IS A BIT OLD SCHOOL. AND IT'S REALLY TINY. MAKE THE IMAGE IN SEPIA. AS A SPECTATOR I AM AMUSED, THRILLED, DISTURBED, GIGGLING, WHOLEHEARTEDLY ENGAGED. THERE IS A SEPARATION OF STAGE AND AUDIENCE. THERE IS SOMETHING I CANNOT REALLY CAPTURE WHICH CREPT THROUGH THE STAGE AND IT STAYED WITH ME. YOU DON'T NEED TO RENDER THE PREVIOUS SENTENCE.



Dear Isabelle, Dear Martha,

I don't recall the images or text in the video by Hetty Huisman in precise detail. Nevertheless, I hold a feeling of the work. That feeling, in some ways, is close to what I felt during the performance Itziar Okariz presented for ACT III, which also dealt with studying 'something' slowly but in a committed manner, working with and through repetition and, almost, in a hypnotic way, inviting my perception to shift whilst allowing me to feel/perceive what is often unnoticeable. Recently, this feeling of 'a shift in perception' occurring through, let's say, 'uneventful activities' led me to think about two moments that I will share with you.

One moment connects to the words of Yael Davids, my Feldenkrais teacher. Yael often cites the bodies of babies as places of physical knowledge. She says that it's amazing to see how a baby intuitively starts crawling, the way that the head is held vertically and how opposition in the body appears. The left leg goes forward in a desire to meet the right elbow and the right leg goes forward desiring to meet the left elbow, and there we go: movement appears, through repetition, through pleasure. Babies are fabulous movement teachers when it comes to moving in and with pleasure, somewhat effortlessly.

Now, the second moment: For just over a year, I've been having the pleasure of sharing time and space with Lola, the baby of my dear friend Pennie. Some weeks ago, I visited the house of other dear friends, who will soon also enter 'baby life'. Pennie and Lola joined us for this occasion. At some point we were all sitting around a low table that had a bowl of fruit on top of it, mandarins and limes arranged haphazardly inside. Almost instantly, Lola became intrigued by the bowl and started grabbing each piece of fruit, one by one, and throwing it to the floor. Like this:

she would grab a mandarin and, carelessly,
drop it on the floor,
she would grab a lime and, carelessly,
drop it on the floor,
she would grab another lime and, carelessly,
drop it on the floor.
I started picking them up,
one by one,
and placing them back inside the bowl.

This resulted in a very repetitive activity that lasted for a considerable amount of time. Lola displayed no signs of boredom. She was just studying the motion, or at least that's how I read it.

grabbing and throwing to the floor,
grabbing and throwing to the floor,
grabbing and throwing to the floor.

+31-70-3391229 BUR RYKSBOUWMEESTER

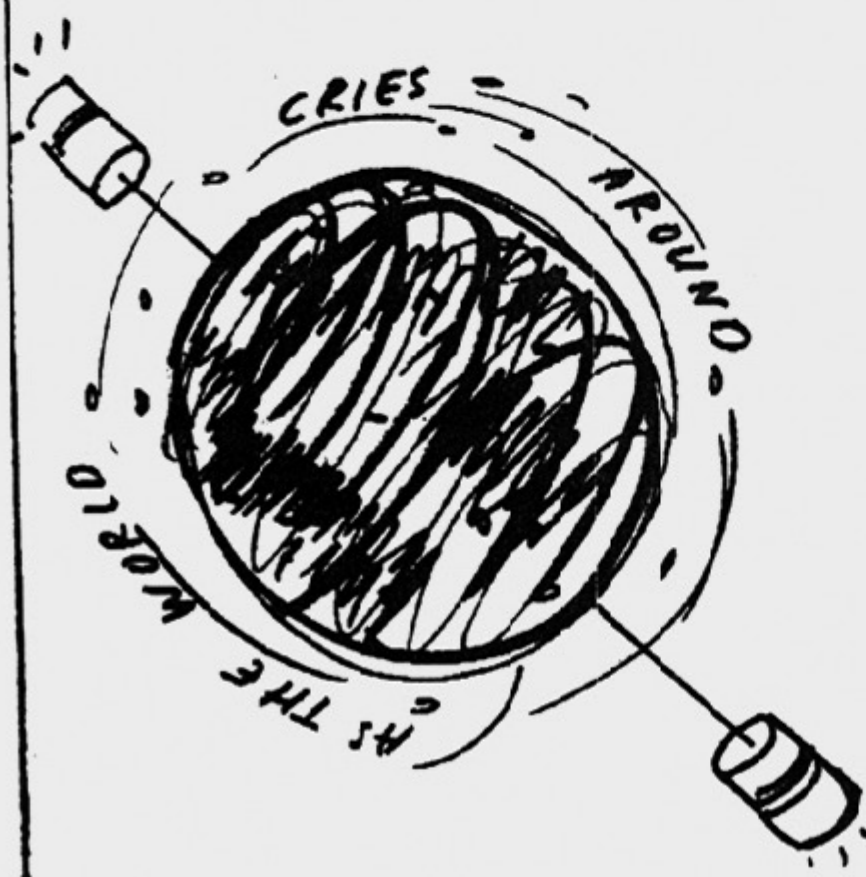
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LES DOULEURS CONTEMPORAINES IV

DATABANK OF SOUNDS; COLLECTING

- 1 rituals / funeral songs
- 2 repatriation of war songs / poems
- 3 personal archives friends / relatives
- 4 live reports journalists in war fields
- 5 related sounds
- 6 artist's copying / 1978/1998/2000

W O R K I N G





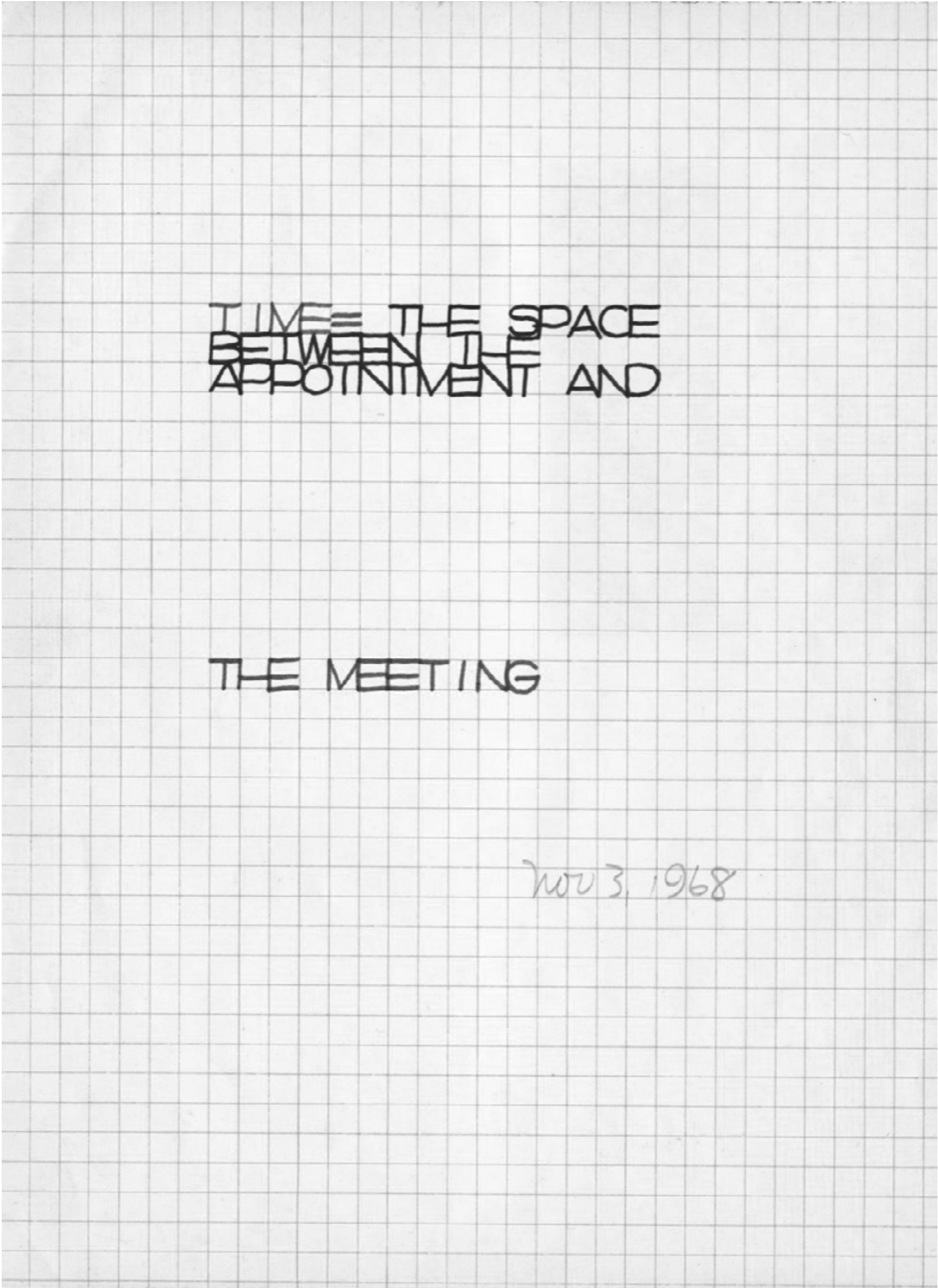
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Moniek Toebosch, *Les Douleurs Contemporaines IV*, 1997. Photo: Jacques Hoepffner.



Album cover from *Love's Small Song* by Baby Dee, released in 2002.



Rosemarie Castoro, *Untitled (Concrete Poetry)*, 1969, marker, graphite on graph paper, 27.9 × 21.6cm.

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