

In my End is my Beginning
Dialectical Images in Times of Crisis
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Lullaby for the End of the World

Post-Identitarian Bodies for a Haunted Writing of the Collective Future

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Abstract The essay analyzes the short film *Sommerspiele* (2023) by choreographer Eszter Salamon as a queer transfeminist science fiction, drawing on the epistemological tools provided by Dance and Performance Studies. Within the empty spaces of Berlin's Olympia Stadium, Salamon calls forth echoes of the past through a post-identitarian body. The life, work, and distinctive style of Valeska Gert (1892-1978) – a German dancer, actress, and cabaret performer who escaped Nazi Germany due to racial laws – are referenced to question the ongoing exclusion of non-normative bodies and materialities by prevailing white, Western, and heteronormative discourses. To cite a definition developed by Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), *Sommerspiele* is a “speculative fabulation” in which the past haunts the present, creating space to imagine and shape an alternative collective future.

Keywords Olympics. Choreography. Speculative fiction. Eszter Salamon. Valeska Gert.

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1 Introduction. Olympic Games | Paris 2024

Sommerspiele (2023)¹ is a “surreal fiction”; this is the term used by the choreographer and performer Eszter Salamon during its public presentation at the *Le sport en spectacle series*, organized by the Centre Pompidou in Paris in February 2024. The theme of sport, which lies at the heart of the exhibition, aligns with the short film set within the Olympia Stadium in Berlin, designed by Werner March between 1934 and 1936 during Adolf Hitler’s regime. The analysis situates the work within the broader context of international sporting events, focusing specifically on the 1936 Olympics, and interprets it as a generative dialectical image that serves to critique and potentially destabilise the cultural and socio-political frameworks reinforced by the 2024 Paris Olympics.

In the months leading up to the Games, we have witnessed an increasing intensification of policies aimed at marginalising the most precarious and vulnerable bodies. Those affected have been removed from the Île-de-France region and relocated to temporary facilities in other areas, clearing space for the exceptional bodies of the athletes. As the games began, the critique of policies affecting marginalized bodies had already been dismissed as mere gossip among those who thrived on controversy. The Italian discussions then turned to focus on bodies and identities, rather than on the athletes’ performances, skills, and results. Racism, sexism, and misogyny, spurred by comments from a wide range of sources, have driven the discussions surrounding the gender identity of Algerian boxer Imane Khelif and the distinctive physical traits of Italian volleyball player Paola Egonu.

In light of these events, drawing on the epistemological tools provided by Dance and Performance Studies, *Sommerspiele* is analysed as a queer transfeminist science fiction piece. The scenario within the empty spaces of Berlin’s Olympia Stadium evokes, through a post-identity body, echoes of the past, paving the way for a radically different future that critically engages with the present. The artist’s body is the locus for a process of multiple afterlives, extending beyond

¹ *Sommerspiele* (2023) is the second short film by choreographer Eszter Salamon. Director Eszter Salamon; Voice and Performance Eszter Salamon; Director of Photography Marie Zahir; Editing and Story Advisor Minze Tummescheit; Colour Grading and Special Effects Arne Hector; Sound Design and Mixing Christian Obermaier; Production Botschaft GbR / Alexandra Wellensiek, Studio ES / Elodie Perrin, Institute of Speculative Narration and Embodiment; Production Manager João Carvalho; Production Assistant Héctor Calderon, Laura Gönczy, Sonja Schreiber, May Dugast. Supported by the NATIONAL PERFORMANCE NETWORK - STEPPING OUT, funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media within the framework of the initiative NEUSTART KULTUR. Assistance Program for Dance, KHiO - Oslo National University of the Arts; Funded by Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Community, the Regional Directory of Cultural Affairs of Paris - Ministry of Culture and Communication, French Ministry for Culture - DGCA (Direction Générale de la Création Artistique).

gender, race, and nationality. It is a dynamic entity that brings forth from obscurity other artists – such as the performer Valeska Gert,² who inspires the entire *Reappearance*³ series, as well as the singer Dora Gerson⁴ – along with other forms of animality and the bodies of the outcasts, relegated to the margins both past and present.

Inspired by Eszter Salamon's invitation to establish a “trans-historical space that bridges artistic and political realms” (Salamon 2023), the core of this essay is an ekphrasis that keeps *Sommerspiele* alive within the text of a book, while also summoning a broader array of artists and scholars in a fluid and unconventional manner. The essay is conceived as an afterlife⁵ of the film, serving as an additional link in the extended chain of trans-media transformations that features Salamon's choreographic project on Valeska Gert.⁶ Traversing from performance to cinema to book, the Berlin artist initially engages with Salamon's body and subsequently with my words – two perspectives that inevitably introduce new dimensions and shifts. Julietta Singh, Saidiya Hartman, Ursula Le Guin, Donna Haraway, and Astrida Neimanis contribute their voices to a viscous⁷ constellation that unsettles the present.

2 Dancer, actress, and cabaret artist Valeska Gert (1892-1978) was a central figure in the German avant-garde of the early twentieth century. Her innovative works, blending dance, theatre, cabaret, mime, and poetry, expose the marginalisation of bodies, especially women, in the German bourgeois society. Due to her Jewish heritage, she was forced to emigrate during the Nazi period, first to Paris and then to the United States. After the war, she returned to Germany, becoming a revered figure in the artistic community and paving the way for forms of expression later explored by Theatre of Cruelty and Performance Art.

3 According to the artist, “the film series *Reappearances* is a cinematic speculation on history and memory” (Salamon 2023), which reflects on the impermanence of performance. “As a cinematic manifesto against oblivion, the series celebrates the genealogy that connects female artists from different periods by composing a transhistorical body, a kind of hybridisation formed of the visions and gestures of two artists, Valeska Gert and Eszter Salamon” (Salamon 2023).

4 Dora Gerson (1899-1943) was a Jewish-German singer and actress, whose performances in Yiddish conveyed the experiences of the Jewish community in early twentieth century Europe. Following the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany, Gerson was arrested and deported with her family to Auschwitz, where she perished.

5 The concept is drawn from the discussion within Dance and Performance Studies regarding the specific ways in which bodies and performative works persist, as explored by theorists such as Diana Taylor (2003), Bojana Cvejić (2014), André Lepecki (2010), José Esteban Muñoz (2019), Rebecca Schneider (2011) and Amelia Jones (1997), among others. Building on Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology and yielding diverse outcomes, these reflections have redefined the idea of disappearance as a fundamental ontological principle of performative practices. In this context, the term refers to the notion of a possible transmedial survival of *Sommerspiele* within the pages of this essay.

6 Since 2014, Eszter Salamon has been working on *The Valeska Gert Monument*, a series of performative acts related to the life and work of Valeska Gert. The *Reappearance* series articulates a tribute to the Berlin artist, extending it into the cinematic medium.

7 The notion of viscosity is informed by Timothy Morton's work in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013). Viscosity captures the enduring and ‘sticky’ presence of hyperobjects as they infiltrate all dimensions of daily life.

2 Lullaby for the End of the World⁸

As the second chapter in the *Reappearance* series,⁹ *Sommerspiele* is a cinematic speculation that delves into the artistic practices of Valeska Gert drawing on her works and anecdotes from her autobiographies *Mein Weg* (1931) and *Ich bin eine Hexe. Kaleidoskop meines Lebens* (1968).¹⁰ Salamon's process of affective re-evocation employs fabulation techniques – using the conditional tense, as Saidiya Hartman (2021, 33) might describe – to narrate an impossible story in which Gert might not have recognized herself:

I hope we could have a discussion while walking on the beach at Kampen or go to see a movie. She would say: “I didn’t recognise my dances except [sic] one or two movements here and there. I think your orgasm scene was totally hilarious, and also the monkey moves, though I don’t remember ever doing them. I loved the ventriloquist animal. So, you have read my book. I don’t know why, but I was missing the quote: ‘Kill that animal!’ And curiously the hints on sport are shy”. So, I would respond: “More will come in the next films”. “I want to see that” she would answer and add: “And you are a very good dictator”, and suddenly both of us would break into laughter. “Do you remember my poem at the end of the book about the rat? Use it”. Then, she would look me directly in the eyes: “You know I never liked museums... but I got your point. And you know that I never performed naked on stage. Why do you do that?” I would tell her my thoughts and she would reply: “Sure. But why are there no more closeups? Anyhow, as I said, I want to live, even if I’m dead”. (Salamon 2021, 66)¹¹

The affective re-evocation through which Valeska Gert navigates the empty spaces of Berlin’s Olympia Stadium is a speculative

⁸ The title references a concept from Eszter Salamon’s essay “The Road to *Reappearance*: How Artistic Vision, Research, and Practice Confront New Possibilities in a Time of Crisis” (2021).

⁹ The first act of *Reappearance*, filmed in 2022 at the Muzeum Susch in Zurich, juxtaposes the affective re-evocation of Valeska Gert with the architecture and artworks featured in the monographic exhibition *Body Double* about the work of the Belgian pop-surrealist artist Evelyne Axell (1935-1972).

¹⁰ The re-evocation approach used by Eszter Salamon in the *Reappearance* series reflects what Vanessa Agnew refers to as the “affective turn in history” in her essay “History’s Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and its Work in the Present” (2007, 299). This method moves the focus away from historical events and processes to center on individual experience, everyday life, and emotions. For understanding Salamon’s work, it is particularly important to note how this affective turn, along with its situated perspective, highlights the political and ideological implications that specific uses of history can generate.

¹¹ The quotation is a fictional conversation with Valeska Gert, conceived by Salamon in 2021.

representation. It transforms past, present, and future simultaneously, drawing from a situated materiality - Salamon's own - to recreate, as André Lepecki puts it:

A whole economy of the temporal [...] that harnesses futurities by releasing pastness away from its many archival 'domiciliations' - and particularly from that major force in a work's forced domiciliation: the author's intention as commanding authority over a work's afterlives. (2010, 30-5)

Through a process of speculative imagination, Salamon fills in the gaps left by the German performer's recollections, who lost the original screenplay after dictating it for three weeks to a drug-addicted transcriber, whose notes ultimately proved illegible. *Sommerspiele* allows Salamon to "feel the boundless relationship of the body with other bodies, [...] an act of love against the exclusions of reason" (Singh 2018, 29). Through a trans-historical 'body-archive'¹² that confronts the failures of collective memory and the persistence of lives and practices, the relationship with the inherent limits of the official historical archive is renegotiated.

From a biographical standpoint, Salamon reclaims the 'degenerate' pasts that were erased or silenced by the National Socialist regime by reenacting Gert's stylistic innovations, her characters, and her experimentation with the voice. She reintroduces non-human animality, exuberant and loud gestures, disrupting the present to serve as a "canary in the coal mine" (Salamon 2023), alerting us to the ongoing presence of biopolitical mechanisms of erasure and exclusion. These mechanisms are rooted in the modern concept of a singular identity, which views the subject as "emotionally contained" (Brennan 2004, 2) and bodies - both organic and inorganic - as classifiable within a value hierarchy. Echoing Julietta Singh's arguments, Salamon reminds us that "the body is not and has never been singular", but rather an "endless collection of bodies" (Singh 2018, 31) that we can nurture in different ways.

The Olympia Stadium serves as the stage for a series of afterlives that unfold on the performer's body as it moves, crawls, and inhabits the spaces of the building, swimming pool, and open-air theatre. The stark nakedness of the slender body stands out in sharp visual contrast to the grandeur of the architectural and sculptural forms. Wide shots render the body a microscopic presence within the monumental

12 The notion of the 'body-archive', as discussed in André Lepecki's essay "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances" (2010), is employed to highlight the distinct memory processes inherent to bodies, which contrast with those of an archive conceived as a repository of documents or a bureaucratic body.

environment, while perspective cuts challenge its integrity by fragmenting it. The trans-historical presence disrupts the ordered geometric landscape of the sports complex. Grotesque expressions defy the depiction of the efficient and functional body of the universal, rational Subject - defined by race, gender, and species - that the space continues to uphold. Valeska's expression of femininity, diverging from the graceful movements of *Ausdruckstanz* (expressionist dance) and the social constructs of early twentieth-century bourgeois German society, intertwines with the materiality of the outcasts. It is both the erased past of silenced¹³ artists and the present of exploited animals that rewrites the future, haunting the present.

Sommerspiele is a surreal transfeminist queer science fiction work, or, as scholar Antonia Anna Ferrante more succinctly describes it, a 'sci-fi tfq'. Unlike 'universal male sci-fi', it conceives:

visioni di mondi e soggetti già post-identitari, non per questo senza Storia, non per questo senza resistenza [...] per interrogare i pilastri dell'epistemologia bianca, occidentale, straight e ovviamente sfidare il capitalismo. (Ferrante 2019, 127)

visions of worlds and subjects that are already post-identitarian, yet still historical and resistant... to question the pillars of white, Western, straight epistemology and, of course, to challenge capitalism. (Author's transl.)

An inhospitable environment, seeming to be detached from the present time while still revealing unmistakable aesthetic and political connections, is inhabited by a singular biological presence that moves, crawls, and croaks. The body is an assemblage of intra-actions, pushing us to transcend the familiar binaries of nature/culture, human/animal, and male/female. Much like the sci-fi tfq explored by Ferrante, Salamon's work envisions a world with a "super-empathic, symbiotic, sympathetic" (112) figure, reaching towards the future through an ongoing process of decomposition and recomposition. The environment it operates within is one transformative, gestational, and hyper-connected water, where the body extends beyond the confines of the skin in the film's final scene. In *Sommerspiele*, the dystopian 'no future' is replaced by a vision of new collective coexistence, rejecting conventional categorizations and value scales, where bodies persist through trans-media migration.

13 Despite surviving Nazi racial persecutions, Valeska Gert encountered significant difficulties in advancing her art in both the United States and post-war Germany. Her satire of social constructs and female stereotypes, along with her transdisciplinary grotesque style, were major reasons for her lack of public recognition.

3 An Afterlife on Paper of *Sommerspiele*

Against a cerulean sky, a building emerges with harsh, straight edges. From our low vantage point, we gaze upward at two parallelepipeds stretching out in parallel directions. A gleaming section of a railing suggests that we are observing diving platforms. From the lower platform, a face and a hand appear – pieces of a body that we assume to be human, which we can reconstruct in our minds, much like figures that form by connecting dots on a page with uncertain lines. On a face made pale by whitish makeup, a vivid red mouth, two eyes highlighted with blue makeup, and jet-black hair rise. The scene might seem like an extended still, were it not for the sun's reflection connecting the water to the structure, subtly indicating that everything is in motion. After a sudden tilt of the head, the imagined body's arms – belonging to Eszter Salamon – surrender to gravity, swinging down toward the earth beyond the architectural edge. The mouth hints at a sneer before releasing fluids that quickly flow downward.

The body drips, infiltrating.

A stretch of water reveals a wider view of the diving board. The shifting reflection forms the backdrop of the film: *Sommerspiele* (*Sommerspiele*, 00'26").

From our low vantage point – where we, as viewers, are confined for most of the film – we follow the performer as she ascends the final metal steps of the diving tower. Clad only in makeup, a short jet-black wig, and white sneakers, she moves up the steps of the building, that dominates the central part of the frame. The sound of footsteps is accompanied by the calls of birds – seagulls, ducks, or crows. For the moment, we rely on our knowledge of bird calls. The face in the distance, barely visible on the screen, makes a movement that seems to turn upwards from our perspective. We take this hint and find ourselves gazing at a sky covered by white clouds.

A flock arranged in a triangular formation, moves towards the highest point of the frame: a contemporary *Symphonie Diagonale*.¹⁴

As the flock begins to drift out of the frame, our focus shifts back to the diving tower, where the performer, with her back against the wall, surveys her surroundings while nervously nibbling her nails. After a brief pause, she exits the scene. We soon spot her again on the opposite side of the building. Salamon peers over the railing, glancing first to the right, then to the left. She retreats and strides

¹⁴ The allusion is to the abstract cinematic experiments conducted in the 1920s by Swedish painter and filmmaker Viking Eggeling (1880-1925). His film *Symphonie Diagonale* (1927), also known as *Diagonal-Symphonie*, was highly esteemed within the French and German Dada art movements. The movement explored through the montage of simple geometric shapes, lines, and curves creates a formal resonance between the animated drawings in *Symphonie Diagonale* and the low-angle shots of a flock in *Sommerspiele*.

along one of the diving boards, her movements marked by exaggerated, almost theatrical gestures. Valeska Gert haunts Eszter Salamon.

Water is between bodies, but of bodies, before us and beyond us, yet also very presently this body, too. Deictics falter. Our comfortable categories of thought begin to erode. Water entangles our bodies in relations of gift, debt, theft, complicity, differentiation, relation. (Neimanis 2012, 85)

We look up again from below at the diving platforms. She reaches the most exposed end of the building and stops. She tilts her head, flexes her muscles, and points in different directions, extending one arm, then the other, and then both, giving commands and nodding at her own instructions. Each movement is accentuated by the rhythmic, fast sound of her breath, which flows out without ever drawing back. Everything follows a single straight direction.

The shift in framing represents a shift in perspective. For the first time, we view an Olympic swimming pool from above. Once again, the illusion of a static image is disrupted by the movement of the water.

We are all bodies of water. To think embodiment as watery belies the understanding of bodies that we have inherited from the dominant Western metaphysical tradition. As watery, we experience ourselves less as isolated entities, and more as oceanic eddies: *I am a singular, dynamic whorl dissolving in a complex, fluid circulation.* (Neimanis 2012, 85)

A more claustrophobic horizon takes the place of the water. The upper part of the horizon is a rationalist tangle of concrete and metal, slicing through and dividing the view. The 'biological', chaotic composition of *Symphonie Diagonale* is now the geometric, orderly layout of *Rhythmus*.¹⁵ From behind a pillar, Eszter Salamon and/or¹⁶ Valeska Gert appears with a monkey-like gait. The body, slightly hunched forward, shuffles along the edge of the pool, using all four limbs. It then stands upright, with the abdomen exposed, legs bent and slightly apart. The arms swing in a conspicuous, exaggerated manner. She wipes her nose with the back of her hand. She moves back, with her arms swinging even more, disturbing the surface of the water. She advances, making her arm complete a full circle to stir the water even more dramatically. She then retreats and disappears behind a pillar.

¹⁵ The reference pertains to *Rhythmus 21* (1921) and *Rhythmus 23* (1923), abstract films produced by the German painter and avant-garde filmmaker Hans Richter.

¹⁶ I use the expression to emphasize both the simultaneous presence and the interaction of the two performers.

Als ich auf die Bühne schoß, war ich so übermütig und so sehr erfüllt von dem Trieb, das Publikum aufzurütteln, daß ich wie eine Bombe in diese von den andern geschaffene Atmosphäre der Lieblichkeit hineinplatzte. [...] und dieselben Bewegungen, die ich auf der Probe sanft und anmutig getanzt hatte, übertrieb ich jetzt wild. Mit Riesenschritten stürmte ich quer über das Podium, die Arme schlenkerten wie ein großer Pendel, die Hände spreizten sich, das Gesicht verzerrte sich zu frechen Grimassen. (Gert 1931, 30)

As I rushed onto the stage, I was so exuberant and so driven by the urge to shake up the audience that I exploded into the atmosphere of loveliness created by the others like a bomb. [...] and the same movements that I had danced gently and gracefully during rehearsal, I now exaggerated wildly. I stormed across the podium with giant strides, my arms swinging like a large pendulum, my hands splayed, and my face contorted into bold grimaces. (Author's transl.)

The performer, now seated on a diving board in the top left corner, is fragmented by the railing, which divides her abdomen and lower legs at the bottom, her upper torso in the middle, and her face at the top. The "frechen Grimassen" (bold grimaces) (Gert 1931, 30) and the grotesque expressions of her face are intensified by a vocal disjunction that suggests multiple identities and materialities, both human and non-human. She yells, croaks, and moans. These vocalizations lead into the next sequence. In a reverse motion, we once again see the pool from a frontal view. The performer moves sideways, like a crab, looking around in fear as she retreats from us. A stone wall dominates the entire next frame, erasing any sense of perspective and horizon. Two bas-reliefs – possibly the mythological figures Terpsichore and Calliope, shown from head to mid-thigh – firmly impose their classical presence. Against this backdrop of conventional formality, the face that opened the film offers a contrasting element.

A series of static shots of architectural elements reiterates the canon of the bas-reliefs, shifting it from the body to the space. Balancing this assertive and unmoving presence is a metallic sound, foreshadowing the gate beyond which the performer reappears. Eszter Salamon and/or Valeska Gert appears as a grotesque, parodic, audacious, and degenerated shadow on the stadium walls.¹⁷

17 In 1937, Valeska Gert was listed among the artists presented in the *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition, curated by Adolf Ziegler and the Nazi Party at the Institute of Archaeology in Munich. Between 1937 and 1938, several of her photographs were shown in the *Der ewige Jude* (Eternal Jew) exhibition at the Library of the Deutsches Museum in Munich.

The gate, once closed, swings wide in front of the performer's 'body-archive', which begins to move swiftly with expansive gestures. The architectural canon's perfection gives way to contemporary ruins, now occupied by the 'citational body'.¹⁸ Watching over the body are two towering statues of male athletes, frozen in place, representing normative ideals.

Set against the backdrop of the two pillars that frame the entrance to the Olympic Stadium, Eszter Salamon and/or Valeska Gert is positioned at the center of a wide shot, allowing for ample sky space.

My body tenses itself slowly, the struggle begins; my hands tighten into fists, my shoulders hunch up, my face is distorted by pain. The pain becomes unbearable, my mouth opens wide to utter a silent cry. I bend my head back; shoulders, arms, hands, my whole body grows numb. I try to defend myself. Senseless. For a few second, I stand there motionless, a column of pain. Then, slowly, life drains out of my body. Very slowly it relaxes. The pain leaves, the mouth becomes softer. My shoulders fall; arms and hands grow limp [...] My head falls quickly, the head of a doll. Finished. Gone. I am dead. (Appignanesi 2004, 190)¹⁹

The two male statues, viewed from behind, face one of the six pairs of pillars of the Olympic Stadium, directing our attention to the symbol of disputes among the Olympic super-bodies. In response to the call for a return to order, Eszter Salamon and/or Valeska Gert invokes animal identities: "I'm a birrrrrrrrrddddd" (*Sommerspiele*, 8'10"). The calls of several crows echo the desire for engagement with otherness. It is the occurrence of a juxtaposition between a fragmented identity arising from "an intra-activity iterative" (Barad 2011, 125) and a stable identity defined by its exceptional nature.

If we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism, then we know that becoming is always becoming *with* - in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake. (Haraway 2007, 244)

The focus narrows on the stands. One of the seats, numbered 11, is taken by the performer, now for the first time in very close proximity

18 The concept was first introduced by philosopher and Gender Studies scholar Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), where she used the notion of 'citationality' to emphasise how repeated norms and performative acts construct gender identity. This idea has had a profound impact on Performance Studies, influencing the work of scholars such as Peggy Phelan (1993), Diana Taylor (2003), José Esteban Muñoz (1999), and Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1995).

19 The quotation presents a description of the Death-Agony Dance by Valeska Gert herself.

to the audience. The performer's face is overtaken by a range of emotions: surprise, disappointment, anxiety, anger, fear, and joy. Eszter Salamon and/or Valeska Gert is a scattered kaleidoscope of voices, and afterlives, contaminating the epistemic horizon of an ideology that originates from the past and persists into the present. Seat number 11 is now occupied by a liminal body that oscillates between the human and the animal. Animality, beyond "the other-than-us", becomes "the other-within-among-us" (Filippi, Monacelli 2020, 14). Eszter Salamon and/or Valeska Gert is "within-among" the crows.

L'incontro con l'altro-da-noi che è con-in-noi (e, spettralmente, tra-noi) è un evento devastante e sconvolgente poiché ci interpella fin dentro le viscere più intime di ciò che chiamiamo *respons-abilità*, capacità di rispondere e capacità di lasciar rispondere, che richiede, da tempo e con sempre maggior forza, di sottrarre le/gli altr* alla categoria dell'Altro (grande o piccolo, non importa), anticamera per il loro inaudito sfruttamento e la loro ininterrotta messa a morte non criminale. Questo riconoscimento [...] porta a galla l'oscenità del quotidiano, del normale, del solito: della struttura sacrificale della nostra società, della malvagità del banale. (Filippi, Monacelli 2020, 14)

The encounter with the other-than-us, which is-within-us (and, spectrally, among-us), is a profoundly disruptive and unsettling experience as it challenges us at the very core of what we term *respons-ability* - the ability to respond and to allow others to do so. This growingly urgent imperative requires us to eliminate the categorization of others as the Other (whether capitalized or not, which is inconsequential), a classification that paves the way for their unparalleled exploitation and ongoing, non-criminal erasure. This awareness [...] exposes the obscenity embedded in the everyday, the ordinary, the familiar: the sacrificial framework of our society, the banality of evil. (Author's transl.)

Another presence haunts the oversized but otherwise conventional statues of the athletes. *Vorbei* (It's Over) (1935) is the song that allows Dora Gerson to reappear. Eszter Salamon and/or Valeska Gert and/or crow and/or Dora Gerson moves among the sculptures. She slithers, infiltrates, and contaminates. Through its porousness, the body absorbs the eloquent gestures of an epistemic violence that spans the past and present. The grotesque serves as a form of resistance, consuming without consigning the violences to oblivion. The Olympic torch is depicted as a toilet upon which one can urinate.

Und Weil ich den Bürger nicchi liebte, tanzte ich die von ehm Verachteten, Dirnen, Kupplerinnen, Ausgeglitschte und Herabgekommene. (Gert 1931, 48)

And since I had no affection for the bourgeois, I chose to embody those whom they despised: the outcasts, the prostitutes, the pimps, the oppressed, and the disreputable. (Author's transl.)

A prolonged series of shots portrays the 'body-archive' of Eszter Salamon and/or Valeska Gert and/or crow and/or Dora Gerson, further amplifying its presence. Lying down, abandoned, positioned, stretched out, cast aside – she embodies a drowning Ophelia, Saint Teresa in ecstasy, a dreaming Hecuba, sleeping Ariadne, a nightmare, a deposition that challenges the space and prevailing narrative.

Vorbei, vorbei vorbei | Ein letzter Blick, ein letzter Kuss | Und dann ist alles aus | Vorbei, vorbei, vorbei | Ein letztes Wort, | Ein letzter Gruß zum Abschied | Ich hab' so fest geglaubt | Es müsste ewig sein | Nun gehst du von mir fort | Und lässt mich so allein. (*Vorbei*, 00'20")²⁰

Gone, gone, gone | A final glance, a last kiss | And then it is all over | Gone, gone, gone | A final word, A last farewell | I believed so firmly | That it should last forever | Yet you are leaving me | And leaving me so alone. (Author's transl.)

As night descends, ghosts disrupt our rest. A "modern canary in the coal mine" alerts us to contemporary dangers: "I lost my memory" (*Sommerspiele*, 21'01"). Eszter Salamon and/or Valeska Gert and/or crow Dora Gerson and/or crab and/or monkey is a relational body composed of water.

Even while in constant motion, water is also a planetary archive of meaning and matter. To drink a glass of water is to ingest the ghosts of bodies that haunt that water. When 'nature calls' some time later, we return to the cistern and the sea not only our anti-depressants, our chemical estrogens, or our more common place excretions, but also the meanings that permeate those materialities: disposable culture, medicalized problem-solving, ecological disconnect. (Neimanis 2012, 87)

20 The ballad *Vorbei* (1935), composed by Rolf Marbot, Bert Reisfeld, AJ Mauprey and performed by Dorsa Gerson, which recalls pre-Nazi Germany, reverberates through Berlin's Olympia Stadium via the voice of choreographer Eszter Salamon.

4 Conclusion

The essay explores a fiction to uncover words and visions that, while rooted in the present, can suggest radically alternative configurations. Straddling the realms of reality and fantasy, autobiography and myth, and intersecting socio-political and imaginative concerns, Eszter Salamon's *Sommerspiele* is analysed as a science-fiction²¹ piece. To imagine an alternative collective future through visionary fabulation, I have identified a body that intersects genres, bridges human and animal realms, and spans multiple temporalities. A fragmented corporeal form challenges the analytical and epistemological frameworks shaped by years of capitalism and colonialism.

Sommerspiele is a choreography whose "pathological potential" (Gotman 2018, 3) allows for an understanding of the crisis of 'contemporary modernity'²² Drawing on the arguments presented by Kélinia Gotman in *Choreomania: Dance and Disorder* (2018), the essay interprets the choreography as a form of disorder that both threatens and reveals the social order:

an act of articulation, one that negotiates a border zone between order and disorder, planned and unplanned motion [...] as an apparatus of articulation investigating the part movement plays in structuring how we see, talk about, or embody relationships between order and disorder, historically and aesthetically.

I turned to the film *Sommerspiele* by choreographer Eszter Salamon to explore the failures of collective memory.

21 The term, drawn from the debate between Ursula Le Guin and Margaret Atwood featured in *The Guardian* on the distinctions between science-fiction and speculative fiction, aligns with the perspective advocated by Le Guin. In response to Atwood's argument that "science fiction has monsters and spaceships", (Potts 2003), she counters by pointing out the definition's unjustifiably restrictive nature, that "seems designed to protect her novels from being relegated to a genre still shunned by hidebound readers, reviewers and prize-awards" (Le Guin 2009). In the 1976 introduction to her science fiction novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin had already remarked on the matter, defining the genre as a form of narrative set in the future that is not about the future: "I don't know any more about the future than you do, and very likely less. [...] I am not predicting or prescribing. [...] I am describing certain aspects of psychological reality in the novelist's way, which is by inventing elaborately circumstantial lies. [...] Science fiction is metaphor. [...] The future, in fiction, is a metaphor" (Le Guin, Mitchell, Anders 2019, xix-xx). A summary of the debate between Margaret Atwood and Ursula Le Guin can be found in Cecilia Mancuso's article (2016).

22 The definition, drawing on Julietta Singh's insights (2018, 29-56), underscores the connection between the current cultural and socio-political system of body discipline and a line of thought that originated and evolved in Modern Europe.

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