With “Utopian Realities – 100 Years of Now with Alexandra Kollontai” HAU Hebbel am Ufer inquires into the topicality of political and artistic developments that became possible for a few years following the 1917 Russian Revolutions. It liberated utopian thinking by bringing it from a distant dream into the effective realm of everyday life. The first attempts to create a new world were made, but the potential of the political upheaval turned into its opposite in Stalinism only a few years after the revolution.

What is the significance of the utopias of that time, and don’t many of these past ideas still appear future to us today? As part of the four-year project “100 Years of Now” by the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, HAU is working with international artists to present four new productions, two different discussion formats, a music programme and installations, which will look backward to measure the distance to the past in order to understand current society in its political form and to update its own positionings. The work, the writings, and the life of Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952) are the productive inspiration here. The Soviet revolutionary and feminist turned the body, love and sexuality into a political topic, developing new models of family and educational policy.
Against Despair

“Utopian Realities – 100 Years of Now with Alexandra Kollontai” is the result of a longer process of exchanging thoughts and ideas with HAU Hebbel am Ufer, in the context of “Hundred Years of Now,” a project spanning the following four years. HAU Hebbel am Ufer sought to make a contribution that would reflect its experience as a place for international theatre and artistic production. This invitation inspired an – indeed almost utopian – cooperation, as it turned out to be generous, trustful, and lacking all unnecessary complications.

With the conceptual frame of the century in mind, one cannot but look to the Russian Revolutions of 1917: world-historic events did not only indicate political subversion and turmoil. Political change also went – at first – hand in hand with thorough societal changes, and was accompanied by a cultural revolution. A new way of artistic thinking emerged and inspired, among other things, the Russian Futurists, who became Europe’s most radical avant-garde. While Italian Futurists continued to discuss contemporary topics with a traditional mode of representation in mind, the Russian artists drew their world into their art by approaching its materiality in wholly new ways: the material came to determine the form – a new ethical imperative that became political in the wake of 1917. Material as priority; this new agenda turned artists into constructors. It was this very thinking that enabled the Russian avant-garde to justify their artistic actions politically, which they did up until the late 1920s. The thus newly created spirit of optimism, which the new beginning sparked, could not only be found in the cultural sector, but in all sectors of life, and especially in radical projects that sought to change traditional concepts of the family or gender relations. Alexandra Kollontai stands as a paradigmatic example for these revolutionary ideas; for her, the emancipation of women was a crucial part of the more general struggle for liberation. As the first female top diplomat, she fought for and personified her political goals forcefully. By taking a look back, we would like to reflect on our distance to the past and at the same time debate its current political relevance. This is why we would take this chance to return to the feminist perspective, the thoughts and actions of the Russian revolutionist, which we will not only discuss in depth, but which we will also hold up against the views that determine our perspective today.

For our Festival “Utopian Realities,” which dedicates itself to the political and artistic developments in the aftermath of the Russian revolutions and the short phase of a sexual-political departure that followed from it, we will engage in a productive exchange with the participating artists and present these innovative co-operations. And this is exactly where the “utopian moment” of our self-understanding manifests itself: we have actively encouraged artists to enter unfamiliar territory, build unusual alliances, explore both new forms and new contents, and in doing so step onto very thin ice.

In their first artistic-scenic collaboration, the Russian curator and critic Marina Davydova and the stage designer and artist Vera Martynov will use the course that is built into their performative installation “Eternal Russia” to remind the audience that, next to the political, artistic, and sexual departures that were instigated by the 1917 revolution, the century was also imbued with a nostalgic desire for the prerevolutionary Russian empire. Inspired by the works of Alexandra Kollontai, the Argentinean theatre producer Mariano Pensotti will present a poetic piece that oscillates between puppet theatre, show, film, and a theatrical performance featuring women in all main roles. The visual artist Vlatka Horvat bases her first production for the stage, “Minor Planets,” on the research she conducted on the Russian revolutions as well as on her personal experience of the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. In a setting that can best be described as a mix of cooking show and construction scene, Simone Aughton and Jen Rosenberg use their first collaborative performance “Everything Fits In The Room” to explore queer-feminist politics and utopian spaces.

Rotterdam’s Studio Jonas Staal will initiate its new long-term project “New Unions,” together with international and Berlin-based guests, they will present their ideas on how to form new communities and how to find ways out of Europe’s current lack of an imaginative vision. In the salons “Relatively Universal,” Lina Majdalanie will draw from her experiences in Beirut and Berlin when re-evaluating cultural relativistic assumptions from a feminist perspective.

Today, utopias do not have the best of reputations. In our day-to-day talk, “utopian” is often synonymous with “unrealistic.” And yet utopias were always radical designs that sought to counter a seemingly unbearable social reality. Even if they were projected onto isolated islands or the far future, they were always drawn in reference to the particular situation of the present. Indeed, so, they testify to the strength to insist on the constructedness of our historical narrative. They stand, in other words, for the courage not to despair. Without this sort of utopian thinking, without the insistence on the possibility of a better future, we cannot exert any political influence.

This festival is dedicated to proving that one does not have to move back and forth between the binary poles of a story that resonates either progress or decay. That our present time cannot merely be that which the past imagined as its future. That we can think these thoughts together with our artists and audiences, that we have the room and means to realize the critical power of utopian thought in artistic works that revite it, is a reality that may, for many people today, already seem like a highly utopian vision. Yet it is, at the same time, also a reality that is closely intertwined with the critical potential of utopian thought: it emanates from our decision to face an almost unbearable situation and counter it with an optimistic glance into the future, daring to develop a vision of communally yielded change.

Annamie Vanackerie and the team of HAU Hebbel am Ufer

Translated from German by Mieke Woelki.
Invited by HAU Hebbel am Ufer, critic Marina Davydova and stage designer and artist Vera Martynov will use their collaborative piece “Eternal Russia” to take a look back onto several centuries of Russian history. The performative-installative course that they thought up presents the short but rather glamorous interplay between the political, artistic, and sexual awakening after 1917. In a text-collective, Marina Davydova reminds us of the supposedly failed revolution of 1905, without which the February and October revolutions of 1917 would not have been possible. The revolution of 1905, which appeared as a sudden and momentous event in a country then often associated with governmental barbarity, surprised and excited not only the Russian and entire Western intelligentsia; it also led to new departures, which only appear illusionary in retrospective. In her text, Marina Davydova switches into a fictional narrative mode that is, however, modeled after historical reality. The audience will recognize the underlying referential model when taking a journey through time, through the images and utopias of “Eternal Russia.”

Hello, welcome! Come along, take a seat!

You are in a club, a club that resembles the one, which Alexander Rodtschenko designed for the exhibition in Paris in 1925. The club that is described in this project was never in fact built in Russia. It is, one could say, a utopian space. It is just as much a utopia as the Leftist ideas, which excited so many people in our country. I was myself excited by this idea. But I do not want to talk about myself here. Not about myself – I am just saying... I hope you understand... With this story, you could start from the very beginning. It all started long before Rodtschenko and the three Russian revolutions.

At just about the time when you – or should we say we – entered the stage of history, Europe was facing, as Marx claimed, the specter of communism.

At the beginning, however, the Russian revolutionists’ relationship to Marx and Marxism was not a particularly warm one. In 1868, the great anarchist Mikhail Bakunin translated the “Manifesto of the Communist Party” into Russian. He even became a member of the First International, which Marx had founded in London, but immediately began to speak out against Marx’s claims. As a consequence, he and a second important anarchist, Peter Kropotkin, were expelled from the association. (...) They proclaimed that they did in no way believe in the dictatorship of the proletariat. In addition, Bakunin wisely anticipated that such a dictatorship would prove even more dangerous than the czarism had preceded it.

How could such a dictatorship of the proletariat even be established in a country that did, in the 19th century, neither have a proletariat nor a capitalistic structure? More than 80 percent of the population consisted of illiterate farmers who could, until the 19th century, be bought and sold like commodities. Economically, Russia was far less developed than the countries farther west. The mortality rate was alarmingly high due to epidemics and contagious diseases, in fact up to seven times as high as in the further developed countries of the west. At the same time, the Russian army was, at least in body count, the largest in the world. Enormous Russia, with its vast land and its millions of slaves and soldiers was a senseless, immobile, and inhuman construct.

To Russians, Bakunin’s anarchism was more familiar than Marxism. Bakunin propagated the only possible form of revolutionary struggle in Russia – the immediate uprising of its entire people. The Russian people readily accepted his ideas. In what other way could a social revolution have taken place in a country that lacked a normal political life; that had never seen public demonstrations, and did neither have a parliament nor a civil society? The only possible form was that of an uprising, and of complete self-sacrifice.

October 1905

And finally we – we of all people – succeeded in sparking the flame of a revolution in Russia. In October 1905, two million people all over the country participated in a general strike. That was huge in comparison to 1912, when not more than 100,000 people had demonstrated on the streets of Moscow!

What we did was no longer an imitation of political life, this was actually existing political life. And it happened not solely at the very top, among those exerting power. The beginning of the 20th century is the only period of time when you could see the emergence of a civil society in Russia.

In firms and factories, social unions sprung up spontaneously. Soon, they were called “workers councils.” Initially, they had thousands, later tens- and hundreds of thousands of members. They were formed as grassroots initiatives and their democratic character is astounding, even from our perspective today. The councils elected women, representatives from various nations, and members affiliated with different political parties – the latter being a particularly noteworthy aspect.

They arranged their own economic and political agenda. Their organization of social life expressed, essentially, the dream of a state that is not weighed down by a bureaucratic apparatus. All these things happened in Russia – the imme- diate uprising of its entire people. What then followed was the great February of 1917, the resignation of Nikolai II., the overthrow of the monarchy, and everything that followed in its wake. (...) Who still remembers today that Russia became, right after the February Revolution, one of the most liberal countries, perhaps in fact the freest country that existed at this point?

What Russia proclaimed was nothing less than that which Europeans had fought for decades ago – freedom of speech and of the press, freedom of assembly and even the right to organize strikes. All constraints pertaining to questions of class, religion, and nationality were eliminated. A militia of the people whose leadership was elected democratically replaced the police. The workday was cut down to eight hours.

Most importantly, they immediately began to prepare the elections of a constituting assembly that had the task of re-defining the country’s state system. It had been decided that everyone above the age of 20 was eligible to vote, disregarding of the person’s gender, wealth, nationality, or social class. The thus introduced election system was more egalitarian and liberal than any other at the time. The rights, which the Russian women had fought for and which were enforced after the February Revolution of 1917, were a dream to feminists all over the world. In France, the same rights could not be enforced before the end of the 1940s. And yet these were difficult times. World War One was still in full swing, and Russia’s national debt grew into the billions.

The members of the provisional government, which was in charge until the constituting as-
The constituting assembly could have turned Russia into the most progressive country in the world.

The constituting assembly was elected, changed permanently. And I do not even want to go into details about the discord and disagreements within the individual parties, among them also the party of the Social Revolutionists. And yet the constituting assembly could have turned Russia into the most progressive country of the world. There was a real chance for that.

October 1917

But then the Bolsheviks entered the stage of history. Who were they? Who even knew them? They were a group of outsiders, the extremist wing of the social-democratic party that had previously not even been represented in the Russian parliament and had also not been included in any provisional government. Suddenly, they were there – like a genie in a bottle.

At first, the Bolsheviks overthrew the provisional government using the slogan “all power to the councils.” Previously, they had won the sailors and soldiers for their cause. They erected their own government and gained power over Saint Petersburg. It is rather ironic that it is this very upheaval, which happened in October 1917, that later became known as the Great October Revolution. It was, after all, nothing other than a counter-revolution! But not everyone was immediately aware of it. And yet the Bolsheviks could not prevent the elections of the constituting assembly. This election took place two weeks after the October overthrow. The Socialist Revolutionary Party, the country’s most influential leftist party, won, of course, the largest share of votes. Because a constituting assembly governed by this party was, however, not what the Bolsheviks had in mind, they once again relied on the support of sailors and soldiers as well as on their battle cry “all power to the councils” in order to dispel the Socialist Revolutionists. Now, they only had to transform the councils into the purely decorative facade of their new government in order to fully install themselves as the new dictators. They did not wait long before taking this final step. In the chaos of war, Lenin’s companions could of course not simply eliminate all of their political enemies and competitors – some of them emigrated, others were incarcerated or even shot.

As soon as the Bolsheviks had solidified their power and turned their party into the dictating power, they revoked all of the October Revolution’s promises and proclamations. In a first step, they discarded the slogan, which they had previously borrowed from the Socialist Revolutionists: “all land to the farmers.” Under the rule of the Bolsheviks, Russian land was not handed over to the farmers, but to the state, and thus to the Bolsheviks themselves. In a similar way, the factories did not go to the workers, but to the state instead. In addition, they declared all political party work that did not regard the Bolshevik party as illegal. They regularly shot people without first granting them a trial or a criminal investigation. This form of state terror differed fundamentally from our current form of individual terror. Soon enough, Russia was once again devoid of either a parliament or political parties, it was lacking in both a civil society and the freedom that defines it.

And yet, the October overthrow could of course not abolish all the accomplishments that were gained in the February Revolution. Some smaller achievements could be retained, for instance the right to public education and some fundamental women’s rights. Nevertheless, I would argue that the revolution in Russia ended in October 1917. And even for those who supported the Bolshevik movement, it ended irrevocably twenty years later when Russia sank into ultimate darkness.

Translated from German by Mieke Woelky.
Gisela Notz clarifies that it was through her confrontation with class conflicts that Alexandra Kollontai, one of the most important Russian revolutionaries and feminists, realized that the fight of the working class could not be won as long as it did not address its women and included the ‘woman question’ in its programs. Kollontai dedicated her entire life to this issue.
Alexandra Kollontai was born on March 19th, 1872, in Saint Petersburg. She was the daughter of a landowning family. Against the will of her parents, but following her passionate feelings, she married the penniless engineer Wladimir Kollontai in 1893. The couple had one son together. Because she was not satisfied with her task as a mother and a wife, Kollontai left her husband and child in 1898. She soon turned to Marxism; the ‘social question’ became her main concern. She studied national economics in Switzerland, became a member of the illegal social-democratic party in Russia and devoted her life to the working class and the struggle for the emancipation of women. After her father died in 1901, she lived together with her son Misha and Soja, a close friend from her childhood days, until the failed revolution of 1905 forced her to leave Russia.

Together with her fellow comrades, she founded the first workers’ club in 1907. That same year, she traveled to Stuttgart to support Clara Zetkin in her effort to found the first Socialist Women’s International. In 1908, she organized the first Russian women’s congress. However, she never got to present the lecture that she had prepared for the congress, having to flee after the threat of being deported by the police forces. After she left the country, she lived in various European countries and the United States, where she met leading figures of the international struggle of the working class. She returned to Russia after the February Revolution of 1917, became a member of the Bolshevik party, later a delegate to the Petrograd Workers’ Committee. After the October Revolution of 1917, Kollontai became a communist revolutionary who had, in addition, spoken openly about the free love practiced by emancipated women. With sure instincts, she directed the Russian representatives in Norway, Mexico, and Sweden until 1940. She fought for the Winter War between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1939/40. In 1945, her poor health forced her to return to Moscow. She was one of the only communists belonging to the group of the workers opposition who survived the purges. She served as a consultant for the foreign ministry of the Soviet Union up until her death in Moscow on March 9th, 1952.

The people of today have no time ‘to love.’

Kollontai fought for free love, for the abolition of the bourgeois concept of marriage and the family, and for women’s equal rights. She was convinced that it was necessary for men and women to find new ways of living together equally because she believed that “the truly liberated woman has to be financially independent from men and must be relieved of the obligations associated with motherhood.” According to her utopian vision, the family, which, in the specificity of the nuclear family should be replaced by a life in a communally organized commune where all members shared the workload and engage in the tasks of household chores and child education.

With regard to the question of a new sexual morality and an innovative eroticism, she belonged to the most radical wing of the party. Her views often earned her criticism and ridicule within her own party. People were, above all, shocked that she went so far as to practice the principles of the newly formulated sexual morality.

In her book “The New Morality and the Working Class,” she criticized the concept of romantic love and denounced the traditional way regarding people as personal possessions. She called for a new morality: “the new women do not want to be private property, do not want the limits of exclusive possession when they love. They demand to be respected for the freedom of their own feelings.” Convinced that a revolution was necessary in order for the working class to obtain power, Kollontai became an advocate of a women revolution, which, however, she only became possible as a “result of the victory of a new societal order.” A society based on competition would leave no room and no time for cultivating a sensitive and ambitious “Eros.” It was, so she thought, time for fundamental changes; and yet the people were obviously not ready to take the necessary steps into the right direction.

What happened to the “romantic spirit of the revolution”?

Immediately after the October Revolution of 1917, Soviet politics moved into the direction of Kollontai’s utopian vision. The traditional marriage law was abolished and men and women became officially equal. The state’s power was reduced; it was now merely supposed to protect the interest of children. In a similar way, the church altogether lost its influence. Marriage and divorce became a purely formal transaction that merely had to be registered at the municipality. Legitimate and illegitimate children were considered equal, maternal leave was complemented by measures of financial and material support. In November 1920, Kollontai’s call for a legalization of abortions was finally heard. The development of new housing public childcare projects, laundry shops, and soup kitchens were supported by decree.

These measures did, of course, neither realize Kollontai’s utopian vision of fully eradicating the nuclear family structure nor did they lead to the desired sexual liberation. The structures that turned the nuclear family into the smallest economic unit remained, even within the working class, more resistant to change than Kollontai had initially assumed. Despite the exhaustion and stress that rendered a normal family life almost impossible, most socialists held onto and wanted to maintain “the small and necessarily trinitic trinity – man, wife, and children” (Lily Braun). The ‘private’ realm remained mostly private.

It was, therefore, anything but difficult for Stalin to retract many of these achievements that had previously been made and to once again propagate the concept of the patriarchal nuclear family. In 1936, it was made more difficult to file for divorce, and both abortion and homosexuality were once again made illegal.

Kollontai was far ahead of her times. Her dreams as well as her political practices were rediscovered and taken up again by the ‘68ers.

Kollontai became the first female top diplomat of the world.

Kollontai became the first female top diplomat worldwide. Although she had become more careful in the then emerging era of Stalin, she was already branded as a communist revolutionary who had, in addition, spoken openly about the free love practiced by emancipated women. With sure instincts, she directed the Russian representatives in Norway, Mexico, and Sweden until 1940. She fought for the Winter War between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1939/40. In 1945, her poor health forced her to return to Moscow. She was one of the only communists belonging to the group of the workers opposition who survived the purges. She served as a consultant for the foreign ministry of the Soviet Union up until her death in Moscow on March 9th, 1952.

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Despite the fact that we can today observe more diverse ways of life, we also witness a re-treat into the traditionally bourgeois, heterosexual nuclear family. Alternative ways of cohabitation and practiced forms of a utopian vision are often stopped short by the desire to meet certain normative expectations. The wish to fit in may result from our precarious living condi-
tions, and from our fear to get lost in the maze of a society that prioritizes self-optimization. The fear of not belonging anywhere leads, ap-
parently, to our desire for steady relationships, which is why young people long for romantic partnerships and bourgeois family structures that resonate with a strong sense of security. Conservative parties calling for more drastic abortion laws and warn against the supposedly imminent “foreign infiltration” of our nation state gain force because they present suppos-
edly “easy solutions” to complicated issues.

The desire for future utopias, for a liberated so-
ciety consisting of free people living together in communities without oppression and violence must not be given up.
We Love You the Way You Are, We Hate You the Way You Are...

On Self-criticism and Lina Majdalanie’s Salon “Relatively Universal”

Lina Majdalanie and Sandra Noeth are familiar with the artistic practices of everyday life in Beirut and Berlin, respectively. Their conversation touches on political analysis and critique, emancipatory acts of solidarity, the waning of historical consciousness as well as the difficult relationship between universalist dominance and relativist indifference.

Sandra Noeth: In collaboration with HAU Hebbel am Ufer, Relatively Universal has been conceived in the format of a salon. What were the reasons behind this curatorial decision?

Lina Majdalanie: For some time now, I’ve been missing a particular form of exchange. In Beirut we used to have gatherings among a group of friends, intellectuals and artists from a variety of fields. We met regularly for a number of years in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. Every week we would get together to discuss a book, an article, a current political problem, or our own work. In doing so, we tried to redefine our roles as contemporaries, as citizens, leftists, artists. Even if we never managed to find all the answers, this was an important time for all of us. After the civil war (1975-1990) was over, we began to encounter new people, some of whom came from abroad and some of whom we had not been able to see while East and West Beirut were divided during the war. This was also when Lebanon began to see its first alternative art projects, like Pascal Fehali’s festival Ayroul or the association Ashkal Alwan, which was founded by Christine Thomé. We stood at the center of these developments, making art, but also providing theoretical reflections that accompanied the projects: What are we to do? What ideas and concepts can we use to best understand our work and continue to be productive? What should be called into question? Is there such a thing as “Lebanese art”? After a while we began to drift apart, geographically and otherwise, and our group gradually dissolved over time.

Is it possible, in all this, to separate aesthetic and discursive concerns from your identity as a citizen?

LM: Behind all this, there is also the question of how to think the “other”, in conceptual as well as in practical terms.

SN: What worries me is that we have gone from saying, “cultural differences should not be demonized” to saying, “this is culturally specific and therefore taboo.” I find this problematic because it constitutes a form of positive racism. “Everything’s alright the way it is, go ahead and stay the way you are.” Such a stance does not help people evolve and attain true autonomy, independence and sovereignty. What should truly be inviolable is the human being itself; cul-

I am troubled by the notion that democracy, freedom, human rights, and the separation of church and state should be considered the cause of our problems and that they are “Western” values, which therefore need not be extended toward “other cultures.”
Features, as important as they are to me and others, come second. Likewise, public discussion of these matters should not only focus on violent and intolerable practices, which exist in every culture. Cultures are never static or homogenous. What are we talking about when we speak of an “Arabic culture”? There are several Arabic cultures: Muslim, Islamic, and “Islamist” cultures, which differ between states, between urban and rural areas, between classes, between siblings... Furthermore, even if the ideas that inform modern human rights are the products of a specific historical context, the values they endorse are not exclusively “Western,” as if they were part of some genetically preordained order. This is where the discourses of different political initiatives and parties as well as of some academic debates really begin to resemble one another, even if their intentions vary. More often than not, we end up with the same gesture: “we love you the way you are” or “we hate you the way you are,” but in any case, “stay the way you are,” so that we don’t have to change a thing about our hegemonic situation. And this despite the fact that there are concrete historical, political and economic problems that, in the Arab world, have stood in the way of the renewals that began in the mid-nineteenth century. Colonialism, wars of liberation, the dictatorships we’ve had and their cozy relationships with the Western powers, being located at a very specific geopolitical site—all these things are only tangentially related to the question of culture.

If we transpose these observations onto contemporary Germany, we come upon the question of hospitality, of practices of invitation and coexistence.

Yes, my own utopia would aim for a situation in which we could talk to one another as human beings, without drawing any boundaries between Western and non-Western, between Us and Them—a situation in which we could also speak about things that are hard to admit or hard to express because we have our own taboos as Leftists, as people who make art or move in the circles of the art world. Let’s make things political again, instead of culturalizing them! Let’s establish solidarities beyond national and political boundaries.

What role might theater play in this process of re-politicization?

In my work with Rabih Mroué I try to steer clear of patronizing attempts to explain the situation in Lebanon to the audience. Instead, we work with the complexity of facts and circumstances, operating on the assumption that our audience is emancipated, curious, and intelligent enough to observe and understand, even if they do not know all the facts. In doing so, we are neither interested in self-justification, taking an exotic, folkloric, orientalist position, nor in spreading a kind of relativistic counter-propaganda that would direct blame at the “West” or the “other.” We do our work as citizens, which means that we proceed from a critique of ourselves, as individuals, as Leftists, with an eye toward the political condition of our society, our country, our state, and all that ails these structures. The best way of saying “we are the same” is to be self-critical.

Perhaps the role of art is precisely to defamiliarize and renegotiate what has become trivial and familiar, to tolerate contradictions while acknowledging inconsistencies.

Exactly, that’s what it’s about: defamiliarizing what has become all too familiar. Here I am also drawing on Hanna Arendt and her thoughts about how we can make the unfamiliar familiar and vice versa.

“We try to steer clear of patronizing modes of explanation and work with the complexity of facts and circumstances instead.”

Let’s make things political again, instead of culturalizing them! Let’s establish solidarities beyond national and political boundaries.”

We encourage and invite everyone who attends the festival to participate in Lina Majdalanie’s salon. For dates, please see the end of the magazine.

Sandra Noeth is a dramatist, curator, and an international lecturer in cultural studies whose previous teaching engagements include, among others, the Stockholm University of the Arts, Ashkal Alwan Beirut, and the Theaterakademie Hamburg. Her theoretical-artistic research projects and publications provide ethical and political perspectives on practices and theories of the body, non-Western cultures of corporeality and movement as well as dramatic composition in dance and choreography.

Translated from German by Julian Henneberg.
How does an Argentinean director living in the 21st century relate to the story of a female Russian revolutionary? Invited by HAU Hebbel am Ufer, Mariano Pensotti uses his current theatre project to explore the political and social changes that the visionary Alexandra Kollontai enforced precisely 100 years ago. In dialogue with Silvia Fehrmann, he thinks about the potential of assuming a rather radical perspective.

Silvia Fehrmann: your piece “Loderndes Leuchten in den Wäldern der Nacht” tells the story of three women. How do these three relate to each other?

Mariano Pensotti: Their stories could be compared to a set of Russian matryoshka dolls: they are fictions stacked inside of fictions. The first part is a show of puppets on a string. The puppets have a very realistic appearance: their faces and costumes resemble those of the actors playing them. With and through them, I tell the rather bourgeois story of a lecturer from the University of Buenos Aires who teaches a class on the Russian Revolution and who, in the process of doing so, begins to question her own motives because her life is so much more conservative than the subject matter of her class would suggest. On top of that, her husband begins an affair with a much younger woman. These conflicts gather momentum until they reach a climax: the woman attempts to commit suicide. Her friends talk to her and say: calm down, let’s go out – let’s go to the theatre. The puppets then sit down and watch a play that is acted out by the actors who previously played the puppets. The play tells the story of a young European revolutionary who leaves her family behind in order to join the fight of the FARC guerrilla in Colombia.

SF: …and whose figure was inspired by Tanja Nijmeijer, who became a member of the FARC in 2002?

MP: Yes, although I am currently rewriting that particular part. Initially, it was supposed to be the story of a Dutch woman, now she will probably be either German or Belgian. The important point is: she returns home after having fought for FARC, and then encounters her impoverished family. Some of her family members encourage her to teach a class on the political uprising to the employees of a computer company. International firms pay for their employees to attend such classes, simply because it will increase their sales figures. It is at this point that the depicted conflict reaches a new climax and the protagonist concludes: I’ve had enough, I’m going to the movies! All characters then sit down in a movie theatre, yet the film that they begin to watch features the same actors that acted in the play up to this point. The film tells the story of a young journalist who works for a political TV show that has just received additional funding. In order to celebrate the good news, the journalist becomes a sex tourist and joins two colleagues on a trip to the province of Misiones, where the descendants of Russian immigrants live. Here, young men make a living by sleeping with middle class women from Buenos Aires. After the film ends, we are returned to the play. We gradually learn that the film changes the European revolutionary’s perspective; she now begins to find new meaning in her return home. And at the very end, we return to the puppet show and learn that the play, which was incorporated in the film, also changed the university lecturer’s life.

SF: The university lecturer from Buenos Aires goes on to write a doctoral thesis about Alexandra Kollontai. How does an Argentinean director living in the 21st century relate to the story of a Russian revolutionary whose autobiography is entitled “autobiography of a sexually emancipated communist”?

MP: That story seems both very close and very far away. It is certainly true that a few of Kollontai’s texts seem rather dated – and dusty – today. At the same time, they raise many questions that are of immediate concern to us today. Kollontai for instance ties gender questions directly to the issue of class: she regards both as separate things that are, however, connected in a rather terrible way. That was one aspect in Kollontai’s works that spoke directly to me. In addition, I have always been very interested in the idea of utopias. I am the child of two political activists who were particularly active in the 1970s, which is why my childhood and youth were steeped in pure Marxism.

SF: “Today, there are no signs of the emergence of anything more radical.”

MP: Of course, I watched all of the arthouse films as soon as they came out. I also watched Czechoslovak short films and films from the GDR. I was a young communist growing up in a country that was as capitalist and brutal as it gets. I am 42 years old now, part of my youth coincided with the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of the new democracy. In Germany and other countries of the former Eastern bloc, the legacy of the oppressive structures within the socialist state is a widely discussed issue. In Argentina, many people died under a capitalist government. Today, we have reached a point where it seems almost impossible to draw utopian visions of society. More than ever, we tend to take the ruling societial and economic form of governmental organization for granted, apparently unable to think up an alternative. We should take the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution as an invitation to ponder our current situation, to evaluate what we have, and what we
 vuelta al siglo XX. | Sergio Eisenstein fue parte de un grupo teatral y su última obra terminó con una película que fue integrada en el montaje. Solo imagina lo extraño que debió de ser, en 1923, una película terminada con un filme!

SF: What is your take on the possibilities of political and aesthetic activism in Argentina today?

SF: My last piece "El museo y la representación de la memoria" already pondered the question of how we write history, and of how our historical narrative can grasp the bigger picture. Is that also a concern of your current work?

SF: For me, it is important to know that my figures are embedded in a specific time and a specific place, and that the history of that time and that place exerts an influence on their personal story – and vice versa. When I think about these connections, Tolstoi and Balzac come to mind. I think about how they made use of the events that structure an ordinary person's daily life and mixed it with much larger historical and political events. They were convinced, in perhaps an exaggerated way, that a true work of art could carry everything within it. A novel carrying the whole world. I like to take up this very idea. And yet my way of using different formats, a puppet show, a play, and a film, arose from my idea of the body, which essentially carries the entire piece. An actor transforms into a puppet whose movements are, however, directed by the actor himself. The audience first sees the physical body of the actor in the play, then the same body reappears in a more mediated form in the film. We are, therefore, invited to think about this body and ponder the question of who, in fact, guides who here. What happens to the body in these different contexts, especially when seen from the protagonist’s or the viewer’s perspective? At the same time, I would also like to pay a tribute to the classic avant-garde of the 20th century. Sergei Eisenstein was part of a theatre group and his last piece ended with a film that was integrated into the play. Just imagine how crazy it must have been when, in 1923, a play ended with a film!

SF: What is your take on the possibilities of political and aesthetic activism in Argentina today?

SF: In many plays that are directed by people from my generation, you can now observe a re-emergence of political issues. It seems as if people are today increasingly aware of the possibility to use theatre as a way to discuss their utopian visions, to ponder the possibility of a revolution or a transformation of our life's organization. The last few years have proven that compromises cannot replace lasting solutions. All reformative efforts face the cruel reality that they can all too easily be undone after eight years. And yet, there are today no signs of the emergence of a more radical movement.

SF: Or no signs that something more radical would move people more liberating?

SF: A more radical option could just as well be reactionary, nationalistic, or even racist. What would we do to resist such tendencies? Don't get me wrong, I do not mean to say that we should go ahead and storm the Winter Palace. I simply want to stress how important it is that we once again ask what we should do. And what we can do. On an artistic level, I have always been skeptical of regarding art as a platform for social change. Just like Fassbinder, I believe that art has a greater impact on those who make it than on those who behold it. Our current piece is our group's most ambitious project to date. We produce 35 minutes of film, set up a puppet show ... such undertakings can certainly fail. And yet I think that this is precisely our political message: let's get ourselves in trouble. Let's enter unfamiliar territory and step into a context that will provide less funding, that will be less interested in radical stories, but let us not retreat, let us instead see how far we can take this.

SF: Schlinkensief followed a beautiful credo, he understood "failure as chance"...

SF: That is a good point! With our current project, I step on to thin ice: feminism, revolution – that is territory where a single comma can change the reception of the entire piece.

SF: In this sort of situation, your parents' generation would have probably put the revolution before gender equality, don't you think?

SF: That is a big mistake that the history of the political Left has to live with. It became particularly bad in the 1970s, when the issue of gender was already widely known. And that is also why Kollontai is so important. Her texts prove that a classless society does not necessarily or automatically resolve its gender question. At the same time, Kollontai has also demonstrated that a bourgeois answer to the gender question does not lead to a society that is more equal and more just.

SF: How would you describe the theatre company that you work with?

SF: It is a multi-disciplinary group so that all members have a very specific role. The group consists of stage designer Mariana Tirannte, producer Florencia Wasser, musician Diego Vainer, and lighting technician Alejandro Le Roux. We follow a rather horizontal work ethic. Although I aim to write the texts and direct the plays, we often discuss ideas and everyone contributes their personal opinion regardless of their specific task in the group. What is unusual about our group is the fact that the actors, whom we work with, differ from one project to the next. The group's cohesion does therefore not so much result from the close interaction of individual actors, but is instead produced by the creative collaborations taking place off-stage.

In that way, you differ from other Argentinean directors whose work emanates from the actors that they work with.

We do not employ the concept of a collective creative process, which does not mean that we do not adjust texts in accordance with the respective actors. The point is that I have, from the onset, a pretty concrete idea of what I am doing. That is why I do not in the end change a whole lot of text during rehearsals.

How do you feel about the fact that your piece will premiere abroad, in another country?

I have already had plays that premiered abroad. And yet it remains a strange experience because I essentially conceptualize my pieces for the local context. My plays come with a lot of text, they are full of references, and demand quite a lot from their audiences. It is almost as if my brain had not yet quite grasped that these plays will also be shown in other countries. In addition, the supertitles can get me wrong, I do not mean to say that we should go ahead and storm the Winter Palace. I simply want to stress how important it is that we once again ask what we should do. And what we can do. On an artistic level, I have always been skeptical of regarding art as a platform for social change. Just like Fassbinder, I believe that art has a greater impact on those who make it than on those who behold it. Our current piece is our group’s most ambitious project to date. We produce 35 minutes of film, set up a puppet show ... such undertakings can certainly fail. And yet I think that this is precisely our political message: let’s get ourselves in trouble. Let’s enter unfamiliar territory and step into a context that will provide less funding, that will be less interested in radical stories, but let us not retreat, let us instead see how far we can take this.

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Is Europe Still a Valid Prospect?

Europe seems to have become a kind of non-place. However, in many regards it is not nearly as bad as other places, which is why great numbers of people try to flee or migrate to Europe in search of a better life that offers peace, the rule of law, the chance for an education, a livelihood, a future. Alex Demirović directs our attention to the paradoxes and ambivalences implicit in this vision of Europe; in doing so, he touches on the kind of questions that also occupy Jonas Staal in his project “New Unions”, which premieres during the Utopian Realities festival at HAU Hebbel am Ufer.

European integration has been characterized by a number of inconsistencies and contradictions. Points of contention have been the powerful positions of Germany and France, the lack of supranational integration and the persistence of national interests, the level of bureaucratization, uncertainty regarding the European Union’s plans for expansion and consolidation, and the irresponsibility slow pace with which it develops its common economic administration and—perhaps even more importantly—its democratic institutions. In the 1990s expectations were raised of the European Union as a social democratic alternative that might exert a civilizing influence on the global capitalist competition between world regions. Yet constitutional projects and treaties that enshrine the values of competition and free-market liberalism bar this opportunity. Thus the future is tied to an undemocratic model of order, while present-day policies are dedicated to deregulating labor and social security, to privatization, to low interest rates for businesses and the wealthy, and to an export-oriented economy.

In the name of Europe, an authoritarian bureaucracy has been forced upon the people in the southern part of the continent, the people of Greece in particular. A politics of austerity willingly accepts that millions of young people either live in precarious conditions or have no work and no prospects at all, even in the centers of the European Union itself. The results are numerous peripheries characterized by poverty, unemployment, and little or no access to housing, education, culture, care, public transport or communication. Those who are older or unemployed are made to feel that they are superfluous, a burden on society. What could be a humanitarian success and a form of social wealth—an increase in life expectancy and in leisure time that people might use to pursue their interests—instead changes into its opposite, torturous degradation and poverty. New technologies lead to an immense increase in the productivity of goods, so that fewer workers are needed to satisfy consumer demand. Demagogues try to incite the workforce against the unemployed, the young against the old. Critical attitudes toward Europe now prevail in many EU member states. People feel as if their freedom is being restricted, even if they profit from visa exemptions, subsidies, or the structural and regional aid of the European Union. Their desire to leave the EU is encouraged by authoritarian and populist parties. In light of power relations that clearly favor the interests of capital, the Left harbors its own concerns, which have only increased in the age of austerity. Nevertheless, many people would like to remain in the EU instead of returning to the nation state. The membership question divides national
translated from German by Julian Henneberg

The European Union is neither a utopia, nor would it need to face up to new challenges. As a political entity, an expression of political will operating within certain historical and geographical boundaries, it can now collaborate with the large number of people not living in Europe to take on problems that European societies have had a hand in producing.

This does not mean buying into illusions but focusing on a realm of possibility that is endangered and can be eliminated only too easily. It means coming up with a new perspective, perhaps even one that could be called utopian. For this, too, has been a European tradition spanning 500 years: using marginalized and still existing practices of knowledge to imagine and sketch out something completely different, seeking out paths leading to places that have yet to be discovered. Needless to say, this is not the exclusive prerogative of Europe or the EU. Europeans should use their knowledge, their resources and their capabilities to accept the consequences of their actions instead of externalizing and shifting the responsibility onto others. It is the EU’s responsibility to stand up for a new, non-imperial way of life, for social, ecological and democratic sustainability, for a democratically organized mode of production and consumption, and to do what it can to counter global power games and establish worldwide social solidarity. Existing resources of wealth need to be dedicated to a restructuring that prevents a further lapse into poverty. With its European Social Charter, the European Union has put forward explicit norms for the redistribution of productivity toward the citizenry. This includes the right to work, the right to vocational training and professional development, the right to an education as well as the right to cultural participation in society. Combating corruption and guaranteeing legal certainty are crucial pre-conditions of democracy. To achieve these, it will be necessary to reform the police force and the judicial system as well as the system of legal training. A radical democratization is needed in order to awaken and incorporate the imaginings and the potentials of the many. Democratization means more than voting rights, party membership, the semblance of participation, consultation and counsel within a public sphere that is controlled by the state and a handful of corporations. It means reconstructing our institutions so that people can make decisions about the problems affecting them when and where they arise. It means open and free communication on all platforms and public participation in decision-making processes. It means fostering political and democratic competencies where they do not already exist. To achieve this, societies need time. They must learn to recognize their members’ participation in their own affairs as a good in itself. Europe and its current political framework, the European Union, represent decentralized spaces in which democratic renewal and the problems facing humanity need to be negotiated. If they join together, projects both small and large might achieve this utopia.

Alex Demirović: an adjunct professor at Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main and a senior fellow at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, specializes in theories of democracy and the state. His newest publication is: Mario Candeias / Alex Demirović: Europe – What’s Left? Die Europäische Union zwischen Zerfall, Autoritarismus und demokratischer Erneuerung (forthcoming).

Translated from German by Julian Henneberg.
Every-thing Fits In The Room

Simone Aughteronly and Jen Rosenblit’s transversal thoughts about their engagement with the work of Alexandra Kollontai. The context: current forms of queer-feminist politics, stigmatized bodies, utopian spaces, and their performance “Everything Fits in the Room,” produced for the “Utopian Realities” festival at HAU Hebbel am Ufer.

1. What interests us about Alexandra Kollontai is her argument for a re-ordering of the family. In her manifesto she discusses the ideal of a new woman, whose societal responsibilities—marriage, motherhood, labor—are to be reconceptualized so that they are shared with the state. Women would then be able to freely decide whether they want to dedicate their productive energies to raising a family, just as they would be able to have children without having to shoulder the responsibility of caring for them alone. In this model domestic labor is reasigned between the sexes and transformed into a source of income, a way to make a living.

But equality here also means adaptation and adjustment. The new woman is expected to adapt to the demands of the masculine work ethic. Thus Kollontai’s vision of the new woman is by no means purely innovative; it also includes certain renunciations.

In her other writings Kollontai assigns marriage a position within the economic order that is equal to prostitution. Her radical views about the economic independence of men and women deny the potential of the female body and foreclose the liberation of the new woman. We in the contemporary world do not subscribe to this sharp separation between a sexual and a domestic economy. Neither is simply “given,” both are products of the long history of female servitude. Not only does Kollontai reject transforming prostitution into a legitimate means of making a living; she argues for its complete abolition.

“Prostitution continues to exist and threatens the feeling of solidarity and comradeship between working men and women [...]. It is time that we found ways and means of ridding ourselves once and for all of this evil, which has no place in a workers’ republic.” (Kollontai, “Prostitution and Ways of Fighting it,” 1921).

We read her work against the background of a long line of feminist discourses and take offense at this systematic marginalization of the unruly female body.

(...)

Kollontai’s radical plea for the sexual self-determination of women and her idea of “erotic friendship,” an argument for equality between the sexes, contrasts sharply with her views on prostitution, which in the final analysis remain indebted to bourgeois morality.

2. How do we deal with loss of memory? How can we direct our attention toward the marginalized and the hidden if we don’t know where to find it? Caring for the obscure is a crucial aspect of a spatial ecology. One will see things one has seen before.

We follow the widespread desire to achieve a structure that unites bodies and ideas. We are interested in the accumulation of objects as a process that aims to exclude nothing. We detect a contradiction in the essence of a manifesto that demands renunciation in order to bring about congruence with an imagined utopia. Here our spectrum of possibilities is limited in the name of progress. We know this conventional approach all too well, and we also know that without a reservoir of abundance, systems of domination are bound to take over. Extraordinary things are always the result of intensifying or expanding things that were already in emergence.

3. To us, the figure of the witch represents a recurrent habitation for the stigmatized body. The witch, just like the queer, is deviant, out of sync with socially accepted desires. Her body feeds off her intimate knowledge of the un governable. Her practices derive from nature, they effect unity with the fruits of the earth; they are sexually liberated, nameless like an eremite, self-healing and unfettered.

The ability of this figure to move outside the normative structures and institutions of church, marriage and family, to gather knowledge, to shape and care for things derives from undomesticated energies that acknowledge intuition as a logical principle.

The witch was seen as a danger to society, she was persecuted, marginalized and murdered. And yet we glimpse her potential in certain roles within society, where her structures of knowledge are directed at the relation between objects and the self. We see the witch in the midwife: a companion in pregnancy who ameliorates the pain of giving birth. Even the therapist can be seen as a modern shaman, someone whose counsel we seek in order to navigate our own intuitions and our entangled, accumulated and contradictory energies. As we struggle against our fears and our own defenses, the figure of the witch teaches us to recognize that organization is a tool of annihilation: a highly problematic legacy.

4. Riots could be considered the work of witches: unnamed events that know no goal, that only manifest briefly and then sink back down again into obscurity, fleeting glimpses of the invisible. We see here an indeterminate correspondence to the way that rituals used to captivate us—the absence of any aim apart from the process itself, no desire for success, no fear of failure.

Looking at the witch in the transition from heathen to Christian ideologies, we realize that the pure, fundamental function of everyday practices has been replaced by a structure of faith that assumes an allmighty will. Function itself disappears; in its stead, we have the representation of functions. Faith does not only replace function but becomes the epicenter of all stages of life. Every thought lasts a lifetime. The faithful never waste...

Translated from German by Julian Henneberg.
Change is a fact of life for Vlatka Horvat – after all, the country she grew up in no longer exists. In Minor Planets, her first full production for the stage, the Yugoslavian-born artist examines strategies for times of chaos and collapse. She spoke to Annemie Vanackere about acts of resistance and the possibility of utopian thought.
In this kind of unstable context, people find ways to adjust, to resist, or to stubbornly persist, to simply keep going. These struggles, which are sometimes foolhardy, sometimes humorous, and quite often doomed, are very much at the heart of my work.

For the 15th Extraordinary Congress, we have already ordered at a number of venues, you invited six women who have emigrated from former Yugoslavia. The women, whose personal experiences have been left out of official historiography, are thus given the chance to reclaim the autonomy of their own memory. Was this an issue of concern to you, especially from a feminist standpoint?

Women I invite to take part in each iteration of the 15th Extraordinary Congress were all born, like me, in a country that no longer exists. We all live somewhere else now for a variety of reasons. But before the war, we shared a time and a place. In the Congress we look back to that moment, but in doing so we do not search for a congruence of perspectives or a consistent version of the past. Official historiography tends to reduce the complexity and context of events and experiences to a single, linear story that provides support for a specific agenda and is often told, as you point out, from a male perspective. In the 15th Extraordinary Congress, on the other hand, official histories, for example, or state-sanctioned artistic practices, are thus given the platform as a form of resistance: resistance against patriarchal structures and frameworks, and against erasure.

If you have been directly influenced by the texts of poets who, during the Soviet era, were simultaneously revered and repressed?

I read a lot of Russian poetry as a teenager and it was great to revisit some of those texts in preparation for this project. In general, I approached the Russian Revolution and my own experience of the breakdown of Yugoslavia as a springboard of sorts, to bring me closer to the question of how people survive in times of radical, all-encompassing change. One thing from my research that has stuck with me particularly is a scene the poet Anna Akhmatova describes in her memoir. It’s the time after the Revolution, she has been stripped of everything—her possessions, her social status—and she is standing in a bread line with everyone else. And while she’s waiting, a woman recognizes her as a famous writer. Akhmatova describes the glimmer of hope, “something like a smile” on “what used to be her face,” as the woman turns around and asks, “Can you describe this?” And Akhmatova says, “Yes, I can.” I’ve been thinking about this sense of agency that comes from being able to conjure up aspects of one’s experience, whether it’s by putting it into words, or by reflecting on it in some other way. There is an invaluable agency that comes with having a voice, resisting oblivion, wresting a narrative from the chaos. In a sense, this ability to reflect on, or even find humor in, one’s predicament is what constitutes a refusal of invisibility, of silent acceptance, of history’s way of dividing us into winners and losers. To observe, to think back but also ahead, to reflect on experience and on possibilities seems like a political act in itself.

“Parallel, or even an oppositional, gesture consists in imagining things as they are not.”

These spots of semi-darkness, remote from the bright lights of the center, provide spaces in which practices of resistance can be developed.

I was a teenager at the time, and I had just moved to the U.S. a few months before the war started, so I experienced it from the perspective of a semi-outsider. I felt invested in the events as they were unfolding, because of my family, my memories, and the sense that I longed to understand something that was rapidly disintegrating, but at the same time I watched it all from a distance. Since the 1990s, nearly all the countries that used to comprise Yugoslavia have been caught in a political pendulum effect. The early ‘90s saw an awakening of a collective sense of national identity and the shift of power to a new generation of leaders. Our collective history shapes utopian visions and hopes, but also our failures and frustrations. To what extent does such a historical framework inform your own artistic practice?
**Simone Aughterlony**

Born in New Zealand, choreographer Simone Aughterlony lives and works in Berlin and Zurich. Having earned a degree in dance from New Zealand School of Dance, she began to dance for Meg Stuart / Damaged Goods. In addition, her work as a dramaturg for the Institute for Collaborative Work, Richard Flanagan and Niklaus Heibling. And since 2003, she has regularly put her own per- formances into play with other productions. Aughterlony’s works revolve around the transformative potential of the body and other central aspects pertaining to the process of choreo- graphic dance. They are motivated by the crucial question of how humor and the mystery of desire heighten theatre’s political impact. Next to nu- merous other performances, she provided the body of the AES+F (Anna Eilmes, Eri Ginzburg, Sebastian Steinberg and Georg Schissinger) for performances such as Bunkier Sztuki (Krakow), Kunsthalle Osnabrück, MGLC and numerous solo exhibitions, for instance at CAPRI (Düsseldorf), Gap- ry. As a critic, she writes for papers like “Iswestja” and in addition serves as chief editor for the magazine “TEATR.” Davydova is artistic director of Moscow’s West European Theatre since Renaissance Time until the End of the XIX Centu-

**Vera Martynov**

The artist and director Vera Martynov served as artistic director of Moscow’s Gogol Centre theatre from 2012 to 2015. Since 2015, she has begun to work more independently at theatres, museums, and galleries. In 2016, she beca-

**Mariana Davydova**

Mariana Davydova is a theatre critic, historian, and producer. She has held the position of Senior Researcher at the Institute of Art Studies, taught classes on the history of Western European theatre at various universities and led work-

**Marina Myshtrik**

Marina Myshtrik was born in Kyivs (Russia), but has lived in Berlin since 2006. She studied Comparative Literature at Freie Universität Berlin. Since 2009, she has been working as a translator, author, and an artist, yet she also contributed to a number of film and art productions, for instance for the art collective Slaves and Tatars or Britta Thie’s “MD8 – ein Live-Drama über die Tragödie des Ratings.” Currently, she is a production assistant for documentary produc-

**Mariano Pensotti**

The author and a director Mariano Pensotti is originally in Buenos Aires. Yet he was invited to the CTR Festival – Festival for Adventurous Music and Art. His works have been shown at renown institutions such as NCCA (Moscow), MROMA (Moscow), Laborator Art Science Space (Moscow), Electromu- nium (Moscow), Garage – Museum for Contemporary Art (Moscow), ZVOL (Prague), and the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art. He received the Sergei- Kuryokhin Award (Moscow, 2013) and the Piu Cube (France, 2014) as well as an honorable mention at the VDA 16.0 competition (Spain, 2014) and the Ars Electronica (Linz, 2015).

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**Register of illustrations and photos**

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Marino Pensotti
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12.–15.1. / HAU1 / Premiere
Spanish with German and English surtitles / category B
Three women are the protagonists of “Burning bright in the forest of the night”. A professor teaches seminars on the Russian Revolution at the university and is confronted with the fact that revolutionary thoughts have not played any role in her life for a long time. A revolutionary who was part of the guerrilla struggles in South America for many years returns to her birthplace in Europe, where everyday life has become unfamiliar to her. The journalist of a political television programme celebrates a promotion by taking a trip to the north of Argentina, where descendants of Russian emigrants who had fled the 1917 Revolution work as sex workers for women from the middle class. A cinematic narrative style connects the different stories to one another. How can political ideals be translated into ordinary life today? Which ideas from the Russian Revolution still apply today? What effects have they had on present-day Argentina?

Studio Jonas Staal
New Unions: Act I–V
13.–15.1. / HAU2
English / admission free

“New Unions” is an artistic and political campaign developed by Studio Jonas Staal in collaboration with frequent collaborators such as artist Paul Kuipers, designer Remco van Bladel and the HAU Hebbel am Ufer curatorial team.

New Unions departs from the current political, economic, humanitarian, and environmental crisis of Europe with the aim of assembling representatives of transdisciplinary movements and organisations in order to imagine alternative unions. New Unions rejects both ultranationalist parties that demand separation from the European Union and seek to return to a mythical notion of the nation-state, as well as the political/economical functioning elite that has used the EU for its austerity politics.

The Berlin edition has been developed in collaboration with emancipatory political parties and platforms across Europe, namely Antarsya (Greece), Popular Unity Candidacy (Catalunya), Common Weal (Scotland), Feminist Initiative (Sweden), The Red Party & Solidarity with Kurdistan (Norway), each of which will confront the crisis of the imagination that keeps Europe hostage today by proposing new scripts for new transdemocratic unions to be discussed with guests and the public alike.

Marina Davydova & Vera Martynov
Eternal Russia
12.–15.1., 19.–22.1. / HAU3 / Premiere
Russian with German and English translation / category C

“Eternal Russia” is a glance at a few centuries of Russian history. The curator and critic Marina Davydova develops together with the stage designer and artist Vera Martynov a performative, installation-like parcour, which will spatially make accessible the connection between Russian history and the present. The project presents the very short but bright interlude of the political, artistic, and sexual awakening after the revolution of 1917. Why could these ideas not be implemented in the long run? The piece is an attempt to explain the barbaric change of Soviet socialism, which just ten years after the revolution was transformed into totalitarian dictatorship, skillfully hiding behind Communist slogans. Furthermore, it deals with one hundred years of longing for the pre-revolutionary Russian Empire. An image of the great Russian utopia arises.

Dakh Daughters
All girls freak cabaret from Ukraine
18.1. / HAU1
Ukrainian with English subtitles / category B

With provocative-political statements and a unique appearance at Kiev’s embattled Maidan, the women band caused quite a furore. The Dakh Daughters (daughters of the “Dakh” theatre, one of Kiev’s most important avant-garde stages) sing of the borderland of an empire, of post-Soviet tragedy, of Donbas, the contested industrial region in eastern Ukraine. A performative-musical slugfest with 15 instruments.
**Utopian Realities – 100 Years of Now with Alexandra Kollontai**

**Houseclub presents: Franziska Seeberg**

**Beginners**
19–22.1. / Aula Hector Peterson School / Admission free
With pupils of the Hector Peterson School

There are some experiences in life that in retrospect we would like to change the course of. Using their own experience, students ask themselves what it would be like if they could start all over.

**Simone Aughterly & Jen Rosenblit**

**Everything Fits In The Room**
19–22.1. / District Berlin / Premiere
District Berlin: Beisammerge 2-14, 12013 Berlin

Category C: Aughterly and Rosenblit navigate current forms of feminist politics beyond manifestos. Unpacking the phenomenology of utopias solicits the fear that all things will not fit in the imagined path. A free-standing wall sits in the middle of the room offering possibilities to adjust, fix and reattach materials. Crushed nuts and pine needles entice the senses. Rhythmic sorcery drives the effort to or-der the room offering possibilities to adjust, fix and reattach materials. Crushed nuts and pine needles entice the senses. Rhythmic sorcery drives the effort to order the room offering possibilities to adjust, fix and reattach materials.

**Vlatka Horvat**

**Minor Planets**
20–22.1. / HAU / Premiere
English / Category D

In “Minor Planets,” five performers work to make sense of themselves and their relation to each other as they traverse an impoverished landscape of detritus, wooden planks and fabric scraps. Using these inadequate resources and locked in a decaying set of rules and miscellaneous games, the five negotiate a place for themselves, making and re-making the world they inhabit.

**Sun 15.1.**
15:00 / HAU / Premiere
Marina Davydova & Vera Martynov

**Sun 14.1.**
17:00 / HAU / Premiere
Studio Jonas Staal

**Sun 13.1.**
19:00 / HAU / Premiere
Marina Davydova & Vera Martynov

**Sun 12.1.**
19:00 / HAU / Premiere
Marina Davydova & Vera Martynov

**Wed 18.1.**
18:00 / HAU / Premiere
“First day of the revolution, that’s women’s day”
Talk with artists of the festival in the Room: 19:30

**Dakh Daughters**
All girls fresh cabinet from Ukraine

**Thu 19.1.**
17:00 / HAU / Premiere
Marina Davydova & Vera Martynov

**Thu 18.1.**
16:00 / HAU / Premiere
Marina Davydova & Vera Martynov

**Mon 17.1.**
18:00 / HAU / Premiere
Marina Davydova & Vera Martynov

**Fri 20.1.**
11:00+18:00 / Aula Hector Peterson-Schule

**Saturday**

**Visit: Electrification**

**Objects and sound installations**
12.1., 09:00–20:00, 13–15.1., 18.1., 20–22.1., open one hour before the performance begins / HAU / Admission free

Each of 7 objects represent and abstract fantasy and reflection which use recognisable images, objects or artefacts. Some of the objects suggest interaction with spectators, others are autonomous. Each of them is constructing an illusion of imaginary utopian reality, in which they act as independent cybertronic creatures.

**Lina Majdalanie**

**Salon – Relatively Universal #1-3**
20–22.1. / HAU / Premiere
English / Category D

In a salon like setting the actress, theatre director and author Lina Majdalanie will subject the concept of cultural relativism to a feministicritique. The starting point is our current international political situation in which war or terror and the strengthening of right-wing populist movements have reached a new dimension. What role do values like democracy, secularism and human rights have today? What forms do they assume? What meaning is bestowed to cultural attributes? Against the backdrop of her life experience in Beirut and Berlin, Majdalanie will seek to define these values and work against forms of division. During these three days everyone interested is invited to take part in the discussion along with selected guests, with Petra Kryl, Sarah Mandour, Hengameh Hagshenasfar. The participants will be published at www.habbel-am-uf.de

**Festival pass:** 3 performances for 30,00 €, red. 20,00 € (freely selectable 12.–22.1.)

**Box office:**
Box office at HAU Kollwitzplatz 3, 10963 Berlin / Monday to Saturday from 3 p.m. until one hour before the performance begins, on days without a performance from 3 to 7 p.m. // Closed Sundays and holidays / Phone: +49 (0)30 25904-27 // Online booking: www.habbel-am-uf.de

**Locations**
HAU – Striesenamstrasse 29, 10963 Berlin
HAU and WAU – Kollwitzplatz 3, 10963 Berlin
HAU – Tempelhofer Ufer 10, 10963 Berlin
District Berlin – Bismarckstrasse 2-4, 12103 Berlin