

“Undefined I, undefined piece”



“Here and now,  
where it’s ever about...  
to happen!”

a musical performance, recitation of a textual script (chant) and production of rhythms, a pair of tap dance shoes & a “zentai” suit, undefined duration (from 10 to 15 minutes), winter-spring 2016.





## Summary

“Undefined I, undefined piece”, a reflexive work

Tales of the three attempts, perceived from the inside

26th April 2016, at the Act Festival, on the Campus of the Arts, Basel

30th April 2016, at the Act Festival, at the Theater “L’Usine”, Geneva

31th May 2016 at the Act Festival, in the Dampfzentrale, Bern

The sung lyrics

## “Undefined I, undefined piece”, a reflexive work

This reflexive work has chosen the performative medium to ground its existence; it is wandering across many different realms as music (chant), poetry, theater and basic tap dance. The project is now presenting itself in this form. This document retranscripts some of the main ideas and intentions contained in the piece as well as a series of tales. This second part narrates the three presentations of “Undefined I, undefined piece”, perceived from the inside.

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This performance is written and played by and for the same author, I, who mutated into an undefined I on three occasions. By wearing a kind of a second skin called “zentai” by the Japanese - an integral suit which hides every personal feature - I tend to embody the idea of a generic human. This intent presents many impossibilities to its realisation as I can't escape the limits of my own skin, the worlds which are rumbling inside, and the particular timbre of my voice amongst other parameters. In some ways, the point of view represented by the notion of an “indefinite human being” resonates with a position commonly adopted amongst artists; those who, from the personal points of view of their body-minds, produce material and immaterial shapes to be apprehended far beyond the strict borders of their skin. Beyond this anecdotic correlation, the “generic human” might only exist in the sky of abstractions. I ironically claim to potentially become a surface of projection for each member of the audience while the show is running.

On the stage, “Undefined I”, the imprecise figure, appears in a lit up field. I recite, sing a textual script. At the same time, I execute a series of varying steps producing a sound closed to music. Almost blind, I am confronted with an almost invisible public as the steam of my voice keeps articulating words through the thin layer of fabric. This flow of expression runs in spite of constraints for slightly more than 10 minutes. To declaim this monologue, I stay in a hectic dynamism while the development shows tiny suspensions, winks of decrease, accelerations and impetuous moments of hysteria. This successively modified course presents parallels with the notion of “becoming” or what it might refer to. The music is uncoiling and building itself at the same time as well as the situation occurring in the parameters of the real, this imminent immanence. Both are actual and potentially ceaseless fluid processes of transformation.

It seems that the undefined figure won't stop its rushing and autonomous production of sounds. The words “Here and Now”, repeated each time in different ways, constitutes the only anchor in the recitation. The lyrics play with an autoreferentiality, only evoking particular elements included in the performance. Those depict a few aspects of this built situation, describing the performer itself, his appearance, his actions and intentions. There is a tremendous tension between the script, learnt by heart, and other components leading to an improvisation. The spontaneous moves of the feet became choreographed in order to manage necessary variations despite peaks of stress. Though, a freedom in the intonations and melodies was kept until the end.

The performance progressively reaches a last phase where the “undefined I” expresses its intent to not let the running performance remain a spectacle. The public is offered the opportunity to influence the acoustic piece, subject to unpredictable changes, until its form and content. Several addresses are made to the spectators invited to tap the floor and sing, to add their own seeds. This aspiration is textually signified and accentuated by simple gestures, hopefully without giving any pattern to imitate.

As the secret wish of the second skin is to be cut, the secret wish of the undefined piece is to be defined by the outside, triggering each spectator’s agency. A silent space as a white page to be (re)worked will be let out, thrown in. Here and now. And then? If no answer follow this call, the participation would have been, at least, evoked. Let’s imagine ! The undefined figure finally manages to get a bunch of reactions. All those various voices, the noise of all those rhythms... Would it remain chaotic? Would it mute to an equilibrium emanating some kind of a music? “Undefined I, undefined piece” is meant to take on its full meaning while its presentations, effectively boundless, keep diversifying themselves each time they occur.



Tales of the three attempts, perceived from the inside

26th April 2016, at the Act Festival, on the Campus of the Arts, Basel

Today finally arrived; with it, the evening of the first show. Here and now. So soon. In this immense black space, on the third floor of the main tower, three spotlights were already waiting to overhang a presence. I was counting the remaining minutes, keeping to make a silly two-way trips from the toilets to a tiny interspace between a pair of gigantic curtains, a hideout temporarily shared with a mysterious stranger. When they would pronounce my name followed by the one of the piece, my entire efforts would be orientated towards the achievement of the whole length of the script. I foresaw to be as close as possible to a state of presence - if this notion can be brought to the world. Soon, I would sing "here and now, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow" and this same attempt would be shackled by tension, blurred by a feeling of emergency. There is hope given that animals, as they are feeling endangered or in the grip of a sudden death, deploy their conservative instincts and are therein debouching in an acute awareness.

"Jetzt werden sie eine Performanz von Fanny Jemmely sehen." I heard them speaking the expected announcement outloud whilst I was glancing through the narrow slit between the sooty curtains. A silent "Now is the time..." was whispered inside; my body was on the point of moving and..."Holy shit!", I was announced in the opposite room. The three spotlights were remaining lonely. I anxiously asked the one with whom I was temporarily sharing the interspace, if he could warn the assembly of the current mistake and move the public to the other side. The people amazingly rapidly migrated to the other room and I felt again the imminence of my entry.

Now is the time, the crucial time. Each time, it is, the instant of the unpredictable act! I prudently walked out of my provisory hideout, at the mercy of multiple gazes. All those I couldn't see. They were all perceiving me, my hidden body; paradoxically, even more because it was covered. The setting I innocently chose some hours ago left me almost blind under the thin membrane. Anyway, I had to open my mouth and throw the voice out. The necessary impetus had to rise. I timidly proceeded: "It could start like..." A tiny silent gap and I carried on: "At the beginning, there was a breath [...]." I took a considerable gulp of air and exhaled, pursuing "a deeeeeeep breath". I thought about how to genuinely reach quietness as I was connecting mind and feet, anchored as a giant tree. While I plunged in this exercise of concentration, this lapse of time hung over me. The warmth increased by the integral suit progressively became unbearable. Despite this uncomfortable proprioception, the voice should go through, the feet should move themselves in variating sequences of regular rhythms, whatever happens inside the bag of fabric.

"Phew!", the point of exhortation arised, this passage of the show when it doesn't want to be a spectacle anymore, when it brings spectators out of their gazes, back into their bodies, out of any comfort zone, in front of possible gestures. "Do you hear me?" was shouted again with a tenacious french accent and all the energy left on this side of the barrier. I carried on: "I wanna hear you tooooooo!", deliberately insisting on a ridiculous tremolo. My tone was somehow supposed to ring hysterical. The struggle to pursue the live reached its apex on the point of the invitation to accomplish. No more landmark; my brain bugged. On the bounce, a verse might have been repeated "just to be sure it truely happened". The request had been doubled; I insisted by mistake and, out of the invisible flock, some voices emerged. "What do I do now? How to express the swift contentment felt as I hearkened them?". While I was questioning myself, the clamors had already ceased.

Sigh [...]. Delighted with the approaching end of this exhausting experimentation, I marked an infinitesimal interruption right before pronouncing the ultime assertion. This break must have seemed long enough for the public to be interpreted as the official cessation of the monologue. They were already applauding. Propelled again in confusion, I opted for tenacity and declaimed the last sentence under the noise of four hundred hands.

Behind this unexpected second of embarrassment, an other one followed. My cloudy sense of orientation revealed itself impotent to lead me anyhow out of the stage. All of a sudden, a hand grasped mine. A sweet voice murmured - she would guide me towards a convenient exit, this confined space from where I came.

30th April 2016, at the Act Festival, at the Theater “L’Usine”, Geneva

Days ahead of the second presentation, I convinced myself to strictly own an unshakeable remembrance of the text. Enslaved by the multiple rehearsals spent repeating the same differently, day after day, even my heart knew it. The evening before, left alone in my sister’s flat, I plunged into an introspective state. Whilst I was eating a carefully chosen piece of meat, I noticed the regular rhythm made by a curious object, an alarm clock in the shape of a white mosque. The impromptu idea of rapping the lyrics on the beats of here and now was welcomed beyond the shadow of a doubt.

The next day, the theater saw me landing with a radiant confidence. To shield myself against any disorientation, I hired one of the organizers to escort me to the centre of the room as well as to pick me up afterwards. This time, the stage fright was more tolerable as I was adjusting the second skin from head to feet. Familiar voices emanated from the corridor to the backstage. All at once, the door opened and a girl bursted in. Hesitantly, she asked: “How would you like to be accompanied?”. By way of answer, I presented her my left arm. She opened the door on the shadowy space ready to be lit on a certain point and let me lone.

Light on. I shivered and inhaled. Further, I can’t even narrate. The time might have been suspended again. A lot of efforts have been deployed to articulate anew those numerous sequences of words and, simultaneously, to keep control over my postures. The sense – built months ago – was scattered in the air, given to decipher, from this point of light which kept following me. I still might be a clumsy dancer. Going ahead with a vivid succession of jumping steps, I pathetically found myself almost stamping on a young girl who was sitting on the floor. I am still glad that this potential accident has been noticed in time. My trajectory was straightaway reversed and I carried on to move these damned feet, impetuously. In a very systematic way, the metallic pieces on my shoes were clapped on the boards, right and left and right and left, side after side.

Quickly as with a snap of fingers, the show took its end. I surely went through the whole score, attentively declaimed it all. I declared “I wanna destroy the stage!” with excitement, I gesticulated to manifest the aperture of the piece and called the public to join... but no voice elevated itself from the benches. My attentive ears caught nothing, no whisper, not even any muffled laugh merging out of this invisible exteriority, besides the opalescence of the second skin. As the light was slowly decreasing, the round of applause followed its shade and I recognized the presence who brought me across the door.

Back in a safe zone, I let the cumbersome suit falling on the floor, revealing the trembling actor who I was, faking self-confidence, searching her own features. Relieved, I fold the piece of fabric and put it in my bag, before hurrying to meet up with my friends. They welcomed me with congratulations: “Oh, Fanny, that was so brave! It’s a big step, an advance in your work, really.” Hugging and kissing were followed by a cryptic silence. It clearly indicated that something had remained untold. There must have been a glitch somewhere. I enquired. The following information has been delivered with careful precaution: “Oh, you know, that was good; truly, that was very interesting, but a strange thing happened... When you addressed yourself to the public, pointing in front of you, inviting us to participate, you were actually turned to the left wall!”. Bursts of laughter. Further comments weren’t long to spring; they expressed a raw of unexpected interests provoked by this accident as both expressions “talking to a wall” and “the walls have ears” retrieved their full meaning.

31th May 2016, at the Act Festival, in the Dampfzentrale, Bern

After a period of struggle with a sticky flu, which almost threatened this third and last occurrence, the evening of the presentation arrived. In spite of everything, I decided to give it a try. Following the sharp advice from a mentor, I spent a few days giving my unsure feet a sense of choreography. Arrived in the green area of the Dampfzentrale, I immediately got in touch with the stage manager to modify a parameter in the setting; the call to participate would be accompanied by a significant change. I asked him to flood the whole space with light as he would be catching these words: "I wanna destroy the staaage, the barrieers!".

A couple of minutes before my turn, I smoked a cigarette trying to ventilate the inner agitation; I was staring at a peaceful yard, thinking about the mode of being I would, once more, tend to set in the inside. In front of this self-engendered pressure, I was juggling with the ideal state in one hand and the current one (a dramatical amount of stress) in the other, in a mixture of expectations, fears and mostly, random thoughts. All of a sudden, a charming guy hurtled down the stairs and stormed in. Visibly concerned, he mumbled with alacrity: "Wir sind jetzt ein bisschen frueh dran... Das Publikum kommt schon langsam an dem Raum!". Hired to accompany the blind soloist who I was, he waited for my immediate arrival. Quick, quick, I inserted my whole body in the thin membrane; he zipped me inside and offered his arm. I followed him in the dark. My solar plexus tightened. I smelled all these presences around whilst he was looking for the cross made of adhesive tape on the ground. He slipped away.

The light hastened to flood the place where I was standing; it drew there the silhouette of a human. The event had to happen yet, even though it didn't appear at all to be the right time. My vocal chords began to vibrate... I had to become more than these outlines, to properly inhabit this house of skin. I had to hold enough strength here, inside, to push the sound through the membrane. Along this ribbon of time, once more, I strove to be in each of my gestures, to put the maximal dose of awareness into the lyrics, lending some weight more to their directions. It remains hard to tell if I veritably was into it! The extreme focus tore me off, somewhere out of myself.

Abruptly, I felt like diving in the dark. Away from the rose glow, without understanding. "Where did the gleaming fog disappear? the circle of light [...], why didn't it follow me?" Probably misplaced, I stepped backwards. Crossing the reassuring periphery of light, I proceeded with the most delicate phase, the invitation. With all the residual forces I managed to keep for this decisive point, I screamed: "Ouuuh tap the floor, tap it! hit it! Hum hum, hit!". I saw my right foot stamping at regular intervals. I heard myself adding without an ounce of hesitation: "Like this!". After this spontaneous intrusion in the text, I left a short blank gap in the course of the spectacle which wasn't supposed to be one! Over and over, I repeated the same step; the extended duration of this simple gesture was supposed to open a space for any interventions.

The entire room was now flooded by light. To my greatest surprise, some steps, snaps and claps started to resound! My frightening and beloved public was pursuing the rhythm! This noise swelled and swarmed into the whole radiant space, slowly shaping itself toward a kind of homogeneity. Joy overwhelmed me. Paradoxically, having expected those reactions such a long time, I didn't know how to behave now that they were occurring! Dazed, I chanted the last strophes.

Inch by inch, the previous enthusiasm vanished to let a cloud on the horizon. The intrinsic desire of the performance was to trace a path from a withdrawn monologue to a blossoming of intersubjective creativity. The piece attempted to share a part of its realisation with some active members of the audience. Therein, I didn't imagine to end up using their efforts as a musical background!

I kicked myself for this. Why would I have followed the intuition of offering a rhythm to repeat as it dramatically shrunk the potential creativity of the public? Was everything wrapped up yet? I removed the bag of skin, strangely eased and unfulfilled at the same time. Yes, "Undefined I, undefined piece" definitely got modified. However, in the secret of the inside, behind the thin wall of fabric, I started to dream up the features of a further experience, in which all still had to be drawn after the comma, [...]



The sung lyrics



It could start like:

“At the beginning, there was a breath,  
a deep breath  
and the voice,  
hidden,  
the voice

[...]

*sound of a boat coming alongside*

[...]

The lower lip began to tremble and...”

But it's not a question  
of genesis after all.  
It concerns the forces, invisible,  
which are bringing  
movements into the world  
of events!

Here  
and  
now ow ow ow ow ow ow ow.  
Here  
and  
now ow ow ow ow ow ow ow.  
Here and now!

“Undefined I, Undefined piece”,  
this artwork is a reflexive work,  
an object evoking itself,  
a performance which tries not to be a  
spectacle, but a participation piece!

And its own duration is the time spent  
in this situation, where you and me  
could be sonorical proposals,

where the event  
is ever about  
to happen!

He he he he he he here  
and  
naou aou aou aou aou aouw.  
Here and now!

There is just an I,  
mh mh mh,  
just an I,  
mh mh mh,  
between your eyes.

There is just an I on a white background,  
standing, staring at you,  
spectators who cannot guess  
the direction of my gaze;  
spectators, who are gazing at me  
as if I would become a spectacle,  
an author, an artist, a performer,

a writer, a dancer,  
a moving beast!  
Hum ha, a moving beast!

But I just want to stand for this I -  
stand for presence  
versus  
representation.

(But) I, undefined I,  
Am I?  
Am I? I am. Am I? I am. Am I?

Hum hum,  
I,  
a silhouette,  
ouh ouh ouh,  
a shape of skin,  
ouh ouh ouh,  
someone,  
one one  
without any particular features.

I,  
surface of projections,  
wanna become you,  
(that) you become me,  
exchangeable faces.

Who? Who? Who?  
You!  
Who? Who? Who?  
eh hum  
[...]

Ouuuuhhhhhh...!  
and I'll tap the floor,  
I'll tap it!  
I hit.  
Hum hum  
I hit.

I'm tapping, stomping.  
I don't wanna stop  
tapping hum tapping,  
tapping the floor  
and singing through the membrane,  
expressing,  
throwing fragments in the sky!

And the sense, trying to find itself  
in between each pair of eyes;  
and we sense;  
our bodies and organs feel  
vibrations, sounds,  
waves as a medium,  
a sudden music  
directly produced without any other tools  
than the human body -

dancing, moving in space  
and time squares,  
walking an own road,  
undefined, like the I - like the piece.

Tracing it, tracing it, tracing it, tracing it.  
Each step as a drawing tool,  
I was conquering my path,  
hardly unknown.

And the tricky part of art  
became conscious!  
Borders between art and life,  
“art and life!”,  
never were hermetic;  
and I’m ready to mimic it all!  
I’m ready to become a moving artwork  
[...] and you can be some too!

Here and now!  
I wanna destroy the stage,  
the barriers  
even though I’m a bag of skin  
even though I’m a bag of skin, eh!  
a baaaaaag of skin, eh!

But who says you want to play with me?  
Oh ! who says you want to play with me?  
And then, what for a song?

Let it appear, hear!  
Let it appear, hear,  
in the wind,  
our becomings, becomings, becomings.  
This rhythmic melody as the parody  
of our becomings, becomings, becom-  
ings, becomings, becomings [...]

Here and now.  
Ah, ah, ah!  
Here and now,  
already?  
Here and now.  
Ah, ah, ah!  
Are you ready?

Let it be for once,  
all improvised.  
Let it be new  
each time of the event.

Event!  
Mh mh  
Mh mh  
Event!  
Mh mh  
Mh mh  
as a process of coming on...  
Here and now,  
where it’s ever about  
to happen !

“Undefined I, undefined piece”,  
this immaterial object is now  
pointing to your response!  
It wants to change through you.  
Ouh ouh ouh  
It wants to change through you,  
be ours!

Ouuuuuh,  
come!  
Ouuuuuh,  
come here and now!  
I’ll leave and go  
and go and go and go and go

and I’ll tap the floor, I’ll tap it,  
I’ll hit,  
hum hum,  
I’ll hit  
and sing through the membrane!

Do you hear me ?

[...]

Do you hear me?  
I wanna hear you too!

[...]

You can tap the floor too!  
You can sing through the membrane too!  
“Undefined I, undefined piece”  
wants to hear your own voice.

Put it out!  
Ah ah out!  
Breath in & out!  
And put it out!  
Ah ah out!  
And tap the floor!  
Tap it, hit it!  
Mh, mh, hit!

Snap, stamp or shuffle,  
here and now,  
shout like a bird!  
And feel,  
oh! Feel  
this flame inside.

Feel it,  
hum hum,  
feel it,  
this poetical force!  
Feel it,  
hum hum,  
feel it burning so well  
and join your voice!

Let’s create,  
let’s create, ouh!  
Let’s create an undefined piece of now,  
ouuuuuuh!  
a piece of now.

[...]

*sound of a boat coming alongside*

[...]

