

Dafür legen wir uns hin

A peer review by Tomaz Simatovic

The performance *Dafür legen wir uns hin* took place in a parking lot next to the Mirabel garden in Salzburg, in the frame of the Zwischenräume festival, in July 2020. The two artists, Claudia Heu and Tobias M. Draeger have occupied a piece of public space and offered 'a chance to lay down'.

The title of this work *Dafür legen wir uns hin*, translated as *That's why we lie down* or *For that we lie down* gives a frame for the actual reason why they/we lie down - *that*. It doesn't specifically say why, so what the *that* in the title stands for remains open to the experience of the one who lays down.

Their exploration about the act of laying down in public space appears to be an exploration of changing perspectives and modes of being in a city public space where traffic seems to be one of the essential presences that the performance aims to juxtapose.

The exploration takes place in form of a participatory performance in which the spectator is invited to lie down while the two performers perform a treatment ritual. While the two participants lay down on their backs the two performers rest their hands on the body of the participant and treat them with the soothing power of their touch.

The performance takes place in three parts: one of the participants volunteers to begin. He is the first one who will receive the treatment, while the second one is offered to sit with the second performer, watching the act few meters away. Having the opportunity to watch the treatment before receiving it he has the chance to know or assume in advance what will happen to him. After the treatment each participant is offered a cup of tea to contemplate the experience, and share it with others.

Placed in a carefully thought out setting the presence of the treatment resonates very peacefully in the chosen spot of the public space around which the traffic, with cars and buses, continuously circulates. The presence of the treatment in the context of the city environment brings the opportunity not only to lay down but to observe as a spectator, or witness as a random passerby, a space of care created through an artistic gesture yet a humane touch, where every individual that lays down and accepts the offer to receive treatment finally arrives back into the present moment and back into own body.

When I have laid down I already felt good about it. I was also the participant that got to lay down second therefore I saw the act beforehand. The touch of Tobias had a captivating energy that gave me a soothing feeling. It immediately brought my attention from the noisy soundscape of the traffic into the place of my body that he touched. I immediately felt connected with my body through the warmth of his soft palms. It was that soft quality of his palms that gave me a calm, and friendly sensation that, despite him being a stranger, I felt how my body, by softening, was giving consent. I experienced my trust into a stranger. I immediately felt that in his touch there is no other intention other than being with me while I am resting.

His touch gave me the sensation that it is not treatment that he is giving me, but he is reminding me that while I have my eyes closed, he is there with me. I wasn't alone. To feel even if I decided to lay down, on my back, in a public space, amongst 'strangers', someone is with me.

My dog George was also there, laying next to me while Tobias has rested his hand on my palm. There have been a few moments when I had a slight fear that George could walk away any minute. Just to give some perspective: George is a young dog and has a tendency to drift away if not held. And in fact at some point he left the mattress where I was laying. But the trust that I felt while being treated by Tobias was so present that I didn't open my eyes in the attempt to calm down my 'fear' but I trusted that everything will be fine. Now that I am thinking about it I could say that Tobias helped me to feel trust and confidence back into the public space, for that time of being. What I mean by this is that I trusted that people around us would keep an eye on the dog.

I appreciated that such intimate and private act is performed in the outdoors, and thus made visible. For a moment I desired that such experience would be normal, that we could lay down anywhere and anytime in our daily lives and connect with another human being the way I and my co-participant were offered to connect with the two performers. But also what I wished to be normal is that there is more trust in the public space as a space inhabited by strangers. In another words I wished that I would have more trust in the stranger. But while being in connection with the performer, though too brief, I could experience a relationship with trust.

In our times the movement and behaviour in the public space is predominantly vertical. The vertical position, is a position usually connected with the human as the *upright* being. Deconstructing the vertical position and thus deconstructing the term for it, which is *upright*, we can see that there is a very tight relationship between the *up* and the *right*, so tight that they are written as one concept, as if the *up* is what is *right*, as in correct, as in acceptable, and sensible for the human to *be* like. In another words it could be said that to be human is to be *up*. Does this also mean awake?

Because of the vertical position the human is on his legs, and in the position to be mobile. Being on two legs the body is always ready to move from one place to the next. The role of the human in the public space is a body that moves through space, a body on the go, transitioning, traveling, yet never really being there, because the public space is not a space for *being-there*, or more precisely *being-there-with*. The public space is rather a space for moving. That is why in public spaces we predominantly see people walking, going from shop to office, from school to the bar, etc. In the public space time does not exist because in the public space time is always passing, and in the same way the human becomes a passerby.

Whether standing or sitting the vertical position usually brings us to see that which surrounds horizontally. And if we see crowds moving we will adopt and absorb that sort of movement. But once we lay down on our back we look away from the crowd. By laying down on our back we have the opportunity to see the sky, which is the *that* that usually when being upright surround us vertically. By laying on our back and looking into what surrounds us above our heads we can gaze into our back as well. The back is where our recovery and support system lies, thus to activate our recovery and support system we have to lie down too, on our own back.

For *that* I lie down.