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MISperformance – essays in shifting perspectives

Edited by Marin Blažević and Lada Čale Feldman

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the middle. Stephen invites her to participate in a simple onstage experiment: he will run out of theater and call her name, then come back to check if she has heard him, and repeat this same action until she can no longer hear him. The purpose of this operation, he says, is to determine "where the theater ends". She agrees and Stephen and Mislav run out, holler, come back, check if they were heard, and then run out again. As they come and go, they take the theater with them, presumably to the lobby and then to the street. What they bring back, however, is a negative imprint of theatricality of the everyday. The audience members, seated on U-shaped bleachers that surround the stage on three sides, look at each other, wriggle in their seats and smile uncomfortably. This discomfort comes from the absence of anything to look at and get immersed in. No actors, but also no screens, no sounds, no cell phones, no earphones. In its final gesture, the performance manages for a brief moment to suspend the apparatus. It asks me to read the title, *Let us think of these things always. Lets talk about them never* in the same way in which the actors/beholders reenact the banquet scene: in its original setting and at the same time radically removed. It is now clear that all along the sheer fact that they can not enter and fully inhabit that which they impersonate is what has kept this performance at a distance from me.

This introduction of the "immersive experience" into the field of visibility adds another layer to the meaning of performance. Contrary to what many video game theorists claim, the emphasis here is not on the new quality of immersion but on the excavation of an obscure meaning of experience. In *This New yet Unapproachable America* Cavell suggests that the semantic meaning of "experience" "goes through ideas of peril, trail, birth, way or journey, approach, all of which are development of the root *per*.³⁷ This opens the way to an idiosyncratic reading of performance as not only that which disintegrates in the very moment of its emergence, but also as that in which pleasure is inseparable from peril, and whose appeal is in its unapproachability.

Laurie Beth Clark & Michael Peterson **MisTopian Performance**

Introduction

Lately, we find ourselves wanting from performance the same things we want from cooking and entertaining. Or from hanging out with friends at a great bar, like one we found in the old town in Rovinj, Croatia called Limbo, a tiny place outside which patrons sit on the steps up and down the street, murmuring softly into the night. Or, for that matter, from a well-known restaurant we stopped at in Zurich on the way to Croatia: *Blinde Kuh* (blind cow), where diners are literally in the dark. In these cases, scenography, hospitality and, yes, an economic exchange, are configured to promote a kind of public yet intimate contemplation.

We're often frustrated at parties by the lost opportunity of a room full of intellectuals gossiping and making small talk. When we can entertain, we do have a bias toward dinner guests who can maintain a "real" conversation. So we became attracted to conferences as a performance venue because they're an opportunity to "entertain" within a frame that in theory encourages serious intellectual play. At conferences, however, it's often the local context that is lost. Conferences can be insular – conversations in bubbles. And so we've started looking for ways to intervene in these dynamics: reframing dinner just enough to encourage the production of knowledge, pushing the "captive audience" of conference crowds into an expanded context.

On a personal dimension, in recent years we've realized how much our creative energy has been (satisfyingly) spent on various kinds of entertain-

³⁷ Stanley Cavell, *This New yet Unapproachable America*, Living Batch Press, Albuquerque 1989, p. 101.

ing, from simple meals with friends to elaborate theme parties. We wanted that expenditure to "count" more; we want to count it ourselves as creative work, and to understand why we had not previously, to re-frame it and in our own way pursue the classic course of playing with the boundary between art and life.

During our first 20 years together, we made both elaborate dinner parties and humble barbecues, hosted crowds of 100 and improvised breakfast for visiting friends, developed elaborately themed parties and celebrated food from our garden and simple ingredients like homemade pickles and miso. We never treated these aesthetic endeavors as part of our professional work as practicing artists.

On our twentieth anniversary, we decided to formalize a connection between our professional lives and our personal hospitality. Under the company name Spatula&Barcode, we have committed ourselves for the next twenty years to make at least one performance annually that draws on the aesthetics we had previously reserved for domestic "entertaining".¹

The first of these took place in Zagreb in 2009. It happened at the end of a year-long round-the-world trip and so the event, called *Misadventure*, focused on travel and presence. After a year back from our travel, we turned our focus to home and absence. At the second Misperformance gathering in Rijeka, documented by this volume, we offered a performance in one of the "shift" slots combined with one of the dinner gatherings. We wanted to assemble artistic, culinary, academic, and social ingredients and put them both in and out of place, put them into a shifted scene, explore how travel and privilege intertwine with the longing for those you wish were here. As the title suggested, *Mise en Place / Mise en Scene / Wish You Were Here* involved three main elements: the gathering of participants and ingredients, the placing of those elements into the "scene" of downtown Rijeka, and the (missed) connections among participants both present and absent. The three main parts of this essay outline our approach and process in making this type of performance and elaborate theoretically on some of what we learn from making it. This includes some of our satisfactions with these experiences, but also some less than celebratory notes on the notion of misperformance so recently valorized. When things truly go awry, misperformance can seem less like appealing happenstance and more like actual error.

We drew inspiration for *Mise en Place / Mise en Scene / Wish You Were Here* from established formations of space, time, food, entertainment, and sociality. In different ways, they represent a collectivity attempting to reflect on and even redress asymmetries of knowledge, cultural capital, and even material privilege. Like a picnic, whose now obsolete definition was "a fas-

¹ Spatula&Barcode has been busier than we expected, producing more than a dozen works by the end of 2013, including numerous works for conferences and organizations and commissions for the Wisconsin Triennial at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art and for SARAS, an international environmental science group based in Uruguay.

ionable social event at which each guest contributed a share of the food" (OED), we hoped it would feel cool to be there. We think a good conference already feels a bit like a *Chautauqua*, the democratically-inclined summer-time educational gatherings that take their name from their origin near Lake Chautauqua, New York, in the late 19th century. Finally, preparing this project felt a lot like hosting an arduously slow-cooked barbecue, which in American practice means a relaxed, celebratory feast, preceded by long, meticulous preparation (a kind of folk *mise en place*).

As we made arrangements for this performance, worrying on the one hand what the guests would bring to it, and worrying, on the other, about how much we were spending on the event, we found something helpful in thinking of it as a *potluck potlatch*. A "potluck," in contemporary American food vocabulary, is a dinner to which everyone brings something, with no organization of what; a pot luck can sometimes be a meal that is predominantly one kind of food or another, rather than a controlled balance. A "potlatch" is a term anthropologists use to describe social practices by some northwest Native American cultures whereby status is gathered and maintained through the sharing and even destruction of wealth, especially of food.

In these early pieces, then, we begin from a collision of genres – art genres, academic genres, genres of social interaction – in pursuit of performance experiences that bring together aesthetic, analytic, and social pleasures and challenges.



Photo: Spatula&Barcode

Mistopias

What kind of place does performance need to be in order for hybrid amalgamations of theorizing and sociality to succeed? What needs to be put into place in order to facilitate them? Half seriously, we suggest a neologism: we are in pursuit of a *mistopian* performance.

Mistopia is a permutation of heterotopia. Heterotopias promise spaces outside the flow of life to dramatize or critique "reality." Mistopias are interventions within the flow of life, embracing but also interrupting the quotidian. Mistopias are not necessarily comfortable: you don't know what matrix you are in, you may be disoriented.

Foucault's discussion of the mirror as both utopia and heterotopia is a particularly useful point of reference here:

I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface [...] But [...] the mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.²

Mistopias as we imagine them offer this mixed experience with the ratio inverted: while the mirror creates an immense not-there world in an object with a small physical existence, the mistopia imbues every element of the real world with a potential to shift, to slip, or even to disappear.

Mis- is not Dys-. A mistopia is not a place where everything is wrong or upside-down. Clearly it's not utopia, either, but it certainly doesn't imply absolute failure or a malign atmosphere. Mis- is also not Dis-. We're not talking about distance or estrangement in the classical Brechtian sense. In mistopic performance, estrangement comes about as a matter of course, but it is not the point, and certainly not the fetish of the performance, as in the Epic theatre commonly understood. In mistopia, estrangement, strangely enough, comes naturally.

There is a dystopia of travel, with which many tourists are familiar, and which travelers sometimes jokingly compare to the truly hellish displacements that are endured by the violently displaced, the political and economic refugees, and those illegally imprisoned or kidnapped to be rendered to torture. And there is a utopia of travel, which most of us have not really

experienced, but which we can imagine and describe. More often, for privileged tourists, there is the *mistopia* of travel, when all is strange but almost all seems possible. While this is a pleasurable state, it is also discomfiting, and travelers reject or ameliorate that in diverse ways. In US airports there is the remarkable sight of grown adults carrying full-sized feather pillows from home, like toddlers clutching a teddy bear. For some, continuing one's exercise routine while on the road is a way of orienting to the new place. Tourists put themselves out of place and then often go about performing a *mise en place* in relation to their new location.

Our current work together draws on our attempts over a period of three years to creatively confront asymmetries of time and place in our joint research (in 19 different countries) and in presentations and performance works on tourism at multiple conferences. Our suspicion is that while the inherent asymmetries of these encounters are often unjust, asymmetry itself offers the leverage (temporarily) to re-order and re-arrange them. If it happens, that re-arrangement occurs in mistopic space. We use the term "asymmetry" here not to obscure the inequalities involved in such encounters, but to emphasize that they are a part of lives *differently shaped* in a multitude of ways.

We conceived of the *mistopia* in part in response to the Rijeka conference's three-day celebration of MisPerformance – of the ways in which one's willingness to embrace missteps and even mistakes is a critical ingredient of creativity. We were also influenced by the conference organizers' emphasis on the idea of shifts and "shifting". Mistopias offer shifted experience, shifted frames.

However, we try not to be starry-eyed³ about the social good represented by the kinds of gatherings that inspire us. While they can feed and nourish all guests equally, they are also often constituted by exclusion, and often function as a display of privilege more than a redistribution of it. And while the components of education, of shared creative play, or the collective production of knowledge may be under-recognized elements of the aforementioned food ways, all ritualized gatherings can of course function to consolidate existing asymmetries of power, knowledge and wealth, rather than to transform social relations toward justice. The church suppers of Michael's childhood formed "community," but also played an important role in maintaining a deeply unjust social order. Even in this global recession the conspicuous consumption of the various oligarchies around the world seem to suggest that unapologetic waste is the order of the day. While reminded of the ugly potential of consumption and even "community," we also took comfort in remembering George's Bataille's interest in the whole realm of "non-

² Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16: 1 (April 1986), pp. 22-27.

³ The venue for the final part of our piece in Rijeka was Konoba Nebuloza; nebuloza means "starry" or "nebula" but can imply fuzzy-headed or drunk.

productive expenditure" as an excess of capitalism. The point of performance might be necessity, or critique – or there might not be any point at all.

While we are addicted to travel, as we demonstrated in our Zagreb performance the previous year, we are also compulsive home-makers, which seems to be our response to the pleasures and challenges of mistopian space. We travel, and then nest. And after putting our few (yet too many) things in place, we often try to cook. Sometimes this just means shopping and then laying out a picnic, but often we are able to satisfy some of our longing for real cooking. On our way to Rijeka, on a little two-burner stove in Rovinj, we made pasta with a sauce of squid, leftover bronzino, chanterelles, tomatoes, red peppers and Istrian sausage. A year before, in Buenos Aires, we stayed two months and gave four parties.

But beyond the literal importance of exercising creative control over our nourishment, we also cook conceptually, and one of the privileges of travel is to perform this action constantly: to select, arrange, contemplate and remember experience. We are greedy for these procedures. These are often mistopian encounters, pursuing our impulse to consume intensely, to come to know a place by walking and tasting, through its map and its cuisine, to interrupt host/guest asymmetries, to entertain. To put it all into place, not for fixity, but to see what happens next.



Photo: Spatula&Barcode

Mise en Place

Mise en place is a cooking term meaning to prepare and arrange all the ingredients of a dish before beginning to cook. To clarify: the meaning of *mise en place* is to put into place everything that is needed for the doing. For

many cooks, this means lots of little bowls, each holding a single ingredient, already chopped, grated or measured. But one's *mise* is not necessarily a bounded, precisely delimited matrix: salt and fish sauce are simply at hand. Or take the *mise* for risotto, which should include a pot of simmering broth that exceeds what the rice might take (also a ladle and a bottle of wine). *Mise en place* means never having to say "I forgot". *Mise* means you're ready, in a state of consciousness and energy, poised just before the fat hits the pan.

It's worth noting that *mise* developed with the rise of restaurants, and is a product of a kind of industrialization of cooking. In food writer Peter Wells's terms, *mise en place*

comes from restaurant kitchens, where a brigade of helpers spends the day getting everything ready for the dinner rush. It comes from a French phrase meaning "make the new guy do it". In my mind, it stands as an unattainable ideal, a receding mirage, a dream of an organized and contented kitchen life that everyone is enjoying except me.⁴

But a proper *mise en place* does not remove uncertainty from the kitchen. No amount of little bowls or piles of cut vegetables can fore-ordain what is to come. The *mise* rather represents the necessary and sufficient conditions for a range of outcomes, many desired, some not so much. Without *mise*, there is chaos. With *mise en place*, chaos may still come, but for a moment there is order.

Mises: All the conference packets are arranged on the table, name tags in alphabetical order, student volunteers smiling at the ready. The inquisitor displays the instruments of torture as the first step in terrorizing the victim. The absinthe and sugar, the ice and the match.

The rubric of *mise en place* was for us a way to indulge our impulse to carry props across the world. In our bags we carried costumes, not just for us but for all the conference attendees. We carried 50 porcelain Chinese spoons and 100 Chinese food take-away containers that Richard Gough left behind at our house five years ago when he was making an installment of his ongoing *Last Supper* performances. We also carried souvenirs (including 50 bottles of Wisconsin maple syrup), totemic objects representing our special guests, half a dozen cameras, again as many hard drives, and so on. Normally we leave home with too many gifts and fill the space they make in our luggage with too many souvenirs. This time, we had the neat trick of off-loading properties and loading up on the "ingredients" for the performance that we asked each conference participant to carry from home.

⁴ Pete Wells, "Food - Prep Work", *The New York Times*, 14 September 2010, section Magazine <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/19/magazine/19food-t-ooo.html> [accessed 24 April 2014].

We had written in advance to all the conference-goers inviting them to join us for dinner and asking each to help build the *mise en place* of the performance by bringing a food item or utensil that invoked a sense of "home" (however defined). This request yielded the following food ingredients: a Cherry Ripe bar and a jar of Vegemite (from Australia), orange marmalade, honey, wholemeal flour, and tinned Corned Beef (from the UK), chanterelles and cloud berries (brought from Finland but representing Sweden), olive oil, red pepper, garlic and basil (from Italy), a home-baked Serbo-Croatian bread and a bottle of the sweet Croatian soft drink called pašareta; and the following utensils: a measuring cup (with both metric and Imperial markings), a rolling pin, a potato masher, a knife sharpener and some toothpicks; as well as the following conceptual ingredients: guilt and innocence.

Our international collaborators (see below) also contributed ingredients. We asked them to suggest to us items that would invoke their presence should the Internet fail us (which in three cases it did). For Eduardo, we brought *dulce de leche*, a uniquely Argentine caramel. We chose *masa de arepas* for peripatetic Marlon because he told us he never travels without this Venezuelan flour. Joseph wanted us to bring yams because his plan was to be eating a yam porridge for the concurrent meal. Franki and Ravi both requested rice, Franki the curried rice that would be part of his dinner and Ravi the red pigmented rice that is used ceremonially in India. Thembinkosi suggested two books that were currently influencing his thinking (Foucault's *The Care of the Self* and Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*), while Kaylene asked us to bring "hell money" which she would actually direct participants to use during the performance. For the team eating dim sum in China, we arranged to get the only two kinds of dumplings available at Rijeka's single Chinese Restaurant.

With all these ingredients on hand, we intended to have a collaborative "cooking" event, where devising conceptual recipes would stand in for the physical chopping and merging of ingredients that might have gone on in a real kitchen. We would have devised recipes, collaboratively, together with our international partners, conceptual amalgamations that merged stories with foodstuffs, theories with kitchen implements.

We experienced clarity quite quickly about gathering the "ingredients" and moving participants through the locale, but struggled a bit more with the question of how to think about the performance genre of the concluding event. We thought of the meal as an intellectual *paella*, a party meal where the hosts provide the rice and the guests add meats and fishes from their own regions. We also wanted to invoke the "stone soup," in which the hosts convince you that things will taste great if you just add that little something of your own.

But one of the elements of our mistopia in Rijeka was that the event we hosted was perhaps too heavily matrixed into the pre-existing food service

scheme. In other words, instead of having a kitchen and dining space under our own control, we were trying to prepare and serve our "courses" in a restaurant environment, Konoba Nebuloza, that had already been defined for attendees by two prior dinners there. And we were trying to devise collaborative performance with dinner guests who had had no "down time" in three days, who rightfully wanted to talk to one another about all the interesting issues that had been presented in dozens of hours of seminar meetings. Given those circumstances, we found participants remarkably good-natured and willing to play along. In some ways this made the event exactly mistopian – the boundaries between real dining (as hosted by the Nebuloza staff) and conceptual dining (as hosted by Spatula&Barcode) were hard to delineate.

Yet some extremely memorable recipes were concocted and enacted. Reana Senjković and Lada Čale Feldman devised a recipe for an action that was performed by Branislav Jakovljević and Marin Blažević in which a traditional bread (that Reana had baked) was "struggled" over and broken (between a Serb and a Croatian) and then served to guests who had to choose which half of the same bread they would receive. Equally resonant but much less pleasurable was the loss of Freddie Rokem's ingredients: fresh chantarelle mushrooms and a liter of cloudberry, evocations of his Swedish childhood which he hand-carried from Finland. These had been taken into custody by the restaurant owner two days earlier with directions for how they should be prepared for the guests. When, late in the meal, we realized that these were not being served, and in fact were no longer in the kitchen, the loss we experienced as diners (for the anticipated tastes Freddie had so vividly described) and the tension between Freddie and Igor (the res-



Photo: Spatula&Barcode

taurant owner, who had “mis” understood the instructions and taken the ingredients home to his family), made for an experience that was more painful than interesting. In contrast to Reana and Lada’s effective, ironic staging of the remnants of the former Yugoslavia, this “non-productive” (even counter-productive) loss could not be recuperated as a “signifying” event.

Mise en Scène

Mise en scène means to put into the scene. It refers to everything that contributes to the intelligibility of the event, not just the principal actors who are delivering lines, but also those that appear in the background. The phrase *mise en scène* draws attention to the role of props, costumes, scenography, in determining meaning. In our case, we were interested in moving participants out of the lecture hall and theatres and into the scene of the city, and in intervening in the scene of the city by adding small enigmatic performances, highlighting our idiosyncratic relationship to the scene of Rijeka.

You know those little maps you accumulate when you travel? Not the ones from the tourist office, full of advertising from places you would never go – by virtue of the fact that they would advertise on a map distributed by the tourist office. No, we mean the maps that people draw for you (if you are lucky) to explain how to find some place. They are never to scale and are usually full of idiosyncratic landmarks. They’re sketched on pages torn out of books, or on the back of something else. They are among our favorite souvenirs, because they record your (attempted) route but are marked by the hand of their maker. From the point of view of spatial precision, this vernacular cartography is often full of mistakes. From the point of view of travel, it produces maps of mistopias.

Vernacular cartography was our first labor on site in Rijeka; we created a map of “Our Rijeka.” This map both ameliorated and exaggerated the “information asymmetry” of travel, providing helpful directions but also obscure references and mis-directions. We redrew the city to reflect bits of history (“this bridge on Mrtvi Kanal used to be the border crossing from the restaurant and hotel [i.e., Croatia] into Italy”), idiosyncratic experiences (“Molekula, our hosts and sponsors. If you didn’t see a performance in the beautiful space there, too bad for you – one of the last of the great smoke-filled performance art shrines”), the childhood haunts of our hosts (“Bar Capitano, [conference organizer] Marin [Blažević] used to play hooky to drink here”), the services we sought out as travelers (“Mr. Grinch, a funky cafe and bar with rock music at night. Lots of advice for tourists here”), the places we walked and ran (“The closest beach is about 2 km that way, in Pećine. Michael swam there on his way back from running in Trsat”). Our map showed 33 sites, half a dozen of which figured in our actual performance itinerary.

We were lucky to be able to persuade Nina Benović to work with us as a singer and musical dramaturg for the performance. We first met Nina, an actor, singer, dancer and member of the internationally known *klapa* group HKUD Željezničar in 2009 when she worked as the “fixer” and stage manager for our first Spatula&Barcode production in Zagreb. Towards the end of that performance, which dissolved as intended into a free-form party, Nina surprised us by bringing a group of her friends to sing the *a capella* music that they tour. The intense sound reverberating in the vaulted ceiling of the Kino Europa’s upstairs lobby was deeply moving; for *Mise en Scène* we wanted to pass along that kind of surprising gift to our “guests” in Rijeka. We thought of this moment as a kind of *pâte fermenté*, a baking technique in which a bit of the dough for one loaf of bread is carried forward as a starter for the new one.

Nina recruited Jelena Horvat, Kristina Rašeta, Ivana Lalić, Marko Robinić (all members of HKUD Željezničar) to be singers and guides for the performance. The idea of these folks as guides was a bit mistopic, since none of them were from or knew Rijeka. All traveled from Zagreb for the performance.

Participants (roughly thirty) met their guides at the last panel session of the conference, where they received S&B aprons and were divided into small groups with shuffled itineraries. Each group would make the same types of stops but spread through the city. We arranged a series of memorable moments, small in scale. We sought to bring participants in small individually guided groups to five locations in Rijeka of personal significance (to us and/or to our site hosts) and to give a memorable experience of the city scene. Groups encountered a character named Igor Žganci Grabancijaš Nebuloza (played by Michael, in a chef’s hat covered by a mask of the absent Richard Gough), who served each person a delicious local fig while singing snatches of a Los Fabulosos Cadillacs song that had featured in our previous piece. Conscious of the length of the conference day and of our project, we then bought everyone an espresso at the legendary coffee house / rock club Palach. We arranged to keep a vendor open at the otherwise closed market place to give flower bouquets to each group. And each guide contrived a simple but surprising tableau, their groups stopping in front of a place of architectural interest (a church, in front of the harbor, an old theatre, etc) to sing for them a quiet solo folk song.

In this shifted, mistopic mindset, we looked to procedure as the source of security and comfort. Not technical exactitude of the sort that both attracts and repels Michael from the alchemy of baking, but the order implied by the *recipe* as both a product of and a process for devising. Like a Fluxus score or a *comedia dell’arte* scenario, the *recipe* asks for actions which are in turn open to interpretation. While we wanted to avoid any religious connotation for this event, we are both drawn to the Passover seder, both for its

clarity and order and for its imperative to improvisation, debate and play. The very word "seder" means order. The seder is a meal defined by procedures: recite, wash, eat a green vegetable, hide a cracker, tell a story, wash, eat a cracker, eat a bitter herb, eat a sandwich, eat dinner, find the hidden cracker, say thank for the meal, recognize one's own good fortune, conclude with rowdy singing. Within that order, other moments are also defined including drinking four glasses of wine and opening the door to welcome the spirit of strangers into one's home.

Misplacing artists into the street can be a risky business but the walking tours came off without a hitch. Participants reported being pleasurable surprised by the small treats and the singing skills of their guides. This is not always the case with misopian performance. Often the removal of a clear matrix for the performance leads to painful and sometimes calamitous misunderstandings, as was the case when Janez Janša was taken into custody by the police for inviting audience members to cut up a flag. It maybe that all the flag cutters understood their actions as taking place within the heterotopic space of the art museum, but the state authorities' failure to accept this distinction opened the door to real and genuinely undesirable legal and financial consequences for the artist and the presenting organization.

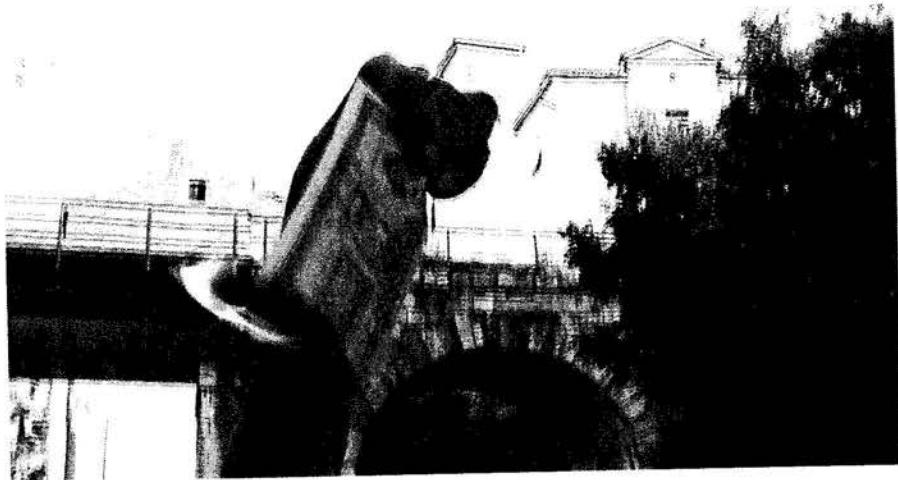


Photo: Spatula&Barcode

Wish You Were Here

"Wish you were here" is a stock phrase, a clichéd sentiment from souvenir postcards. It draws attention to the absence of the recipient from the privileged location of the traveler. The rubric of "mis" that these two Croatian conferences and this volume celebrate encouraged us to pay attention to what and who was missing from this scene.

While the gathering in Rijeka included scholars from both Western and Eastern Europe, North America, and Australia, we noticed the absence of colleagues from Asia, Africa, and South America; we responded by inviting as dinner guests colleagues from countries and continents not represented. Kaylene Tam in Singapore, Franki Raden in Jakarta, Eduardo Santiere in Buenos Aires, Marlon Barrios Solano in Quito, Joseph Adande in Porto-Novo, Thembinkosi Goniwe in Johannesburg, Ravi Khote in a village outside Mumbai, and May Hu in Beijing were all scheduled to dine with us via Skype.

Our goal was to have concurrent meals in seven distinct time zones. For Marlon, who was just arriving in Ecuador the night before, it would be breakfast time during the performance. In Benin, Joseph would sit down to lunch in another Hemisphere but in the same time zone. Franki, in Indonesia, would be breaking his Ramadan fast for the day, and his first course would be dessert. In China, May Hu would be eating takeout dumplings with eight of her friends in one of their office conference rooms just after their work day ended. And for Kaylene in Singapore, it was nearing bedtime.

Preparing for this dinner using Internet telephony made us aware indeed of the "failed chronotypes" invoked by the organizers. Technologies such as Internet video-conferencing draw attention to how much absence a tele-presence can invoke, to the pang of distance made apparently shorter, to the deep incompleteness of connecting, and to the asynchronicity of synchronous communication. In devising this event, we hoped that temporal asymmetries would stand in for other cultural and geographic displacements.

In the end our dinner made both more and fewer connections than we anticipated. Franki was joined by his apprentice Zaki Andiga. May's table in Beijing also included Emily Meng, Lucy Feiyang, Xiangquan Zheng, Tiancheng Li, Hua Han, Fei Yan, Sha Sha, and Xiaoxia Guo. But three of our eight scheduled connections failed entirely. Marlon's residency was not able to provide a internet connection at all, and our repeated efforts to contact Joseph did not succeed although he and his "web master" spent four hours waiting at his computer on campus at the Université d'Abomey-Calavi, and we never were able to connect with Thembinkosi. Of those that connected, the quality varied. Kaylene Tam's directions from Singapore for burning money for the dead, enacted by Selma Banich and Nicki Polykarpou in Croatia, turned emotional and poignant. Marco (one of our singer guides) turned out to have conversational fluidity in almost all the native languages of our international guests and flitted from table to table making small talk in Chinese, Spanish and Indonesian. But the restaurant was crowded, the participants – garrulous, unwinding after several intense days, and as the event went on in some cases increasingly inebriated – were in not necessarily in the mood for struggling

with the barely audible Skype connections or for bringing new acquaintances into the ongoing conversations of the conference.

As we review the video tapes of *Wish You Were Here*, one of the least fraught aspects of the dinner seems to have been the haunting musical performances of the members of HKUD Željezničar. While other elements of the dining experience were out of (our) control, these musical disruptions produced the strangely pleasurable, not-fully-recuperable-through-exegesis, moments that are the best that misopian performance can offer. We had hoped, through the service of small unfamiliar bites to be eaten with out of context utensils (chopsticks, straws, etc.) to produce a parallel culinary misopia, but the owner and staff at Konoba Nebuloza did not understand or decided not to participate in our vision; after the first course the meal devolved into long waits for large volumes of already familiar dishes.



Photo: Spatula&Barcode

Misperformance and Asymmetry

We know that in cooking, as in performance, mistakes only sometimes lead to disaster. Sometimes the failure of a technology signifies – and sometimes it just fails. While we never hope for a soufflé to fall, we often court the discomforts of unfamiliar cuisines and the surprises of “new gastronomy”. While we are drawn to the care-free attitude suggested by the celebration of misperformance, we find ourselves thinking that some misses are, in fact, losses. Frankly, the image of Joseph and his “web master” waiting for four hours on campus at Université d’Abomey-Calavi breaks our hearts.⁵ We’re

⁵ We were therefore elated to feature Joseph as the guest of honor the following year, via a perfect web connection, for a small project called “On Order” which was based on our interest in the seder procedure.

still longing for chantarelles and cloudberry and we’re still struggling to devise a Rijeka Misperformance cookbook based on the ingredients. But we are also gladly carried forward the “old dough” (*pâte fermentée*) of vernacular cartography, to revive it as the starter for our next planned event, in Utrecht, called *Bicycle Map Spoon*.⁶

Though we continue to be interested in the opportunities offered by the category of conference performance, which we recognize as an opportunity to make work for small captive audiences of international intellectuals displaced from their home space, we have come to appreciate some of its vulnerabilities and limitations. Perhaps the least of these problems is the heightened professional risk of offering one’s least structured work for the scrutiny of one’s most exacting colleagues. So far, this is balanced by the rewards of making work for a semi-specific, semi-known audience.

More troubling is that the “in group” quality of conference performance tends toward not only the insularity from spatial context (that we had sought to redress through vernacular cartography in *Mise en Scène...*) but also a social insularity that keeps locals on the outside of conference proceedings. We became aware of this dynamic early on during our stay in Rijeka when, in advance of the arrival of other PSi conferees, we attended several events of the Zoom Festival and found ourselves surrounded by a group of people who clearly knew one another and who formed a social network that sustained a thriving scene of alternative music and experimental cafés. Some of this we sought to highlight through the cartographic *mise en scène* project. The lack of overlap between the two constituencies was most apparent in the afterparty. This misconnect may be attributed to the inevitable “asymmetries of travel”, the first of which is that you, the traveler, are away from home, while usually at least some of those others around you are not.

However, to note the asymmetries that abound in tourism (and tourism studies) is to discover not just that the various performances involved sometimes or often “miss”, but that those very interactions are structurally mis-shapen – that is, asymmetrical. Obvious examples include the asymmetries in financial and social capital reflected in the stereotypical tourist encounter. In tourism which moves from the rich “West” to the “developing” world, however, *information asymmetry* also becomes a crucial counter-balance to unequal privilege. In this case the locals’ exploitation of their knowledge of the objects of tourism can be seen as a “weapon of the weak”,⁷ while tourist guidebooks and other organizations of tourist knowledge function like economic espionage or even counter-insurgency. In touristic and scholarly encounters, asymmetries result from people out of

⁶ *Bicycle Map Spoon* developed many of the themes discussed here, organizing groups of participants for self-directed cycle tours of Utrecht, focusing on a mix of touristic and more marginal and counter-cultural sites.

⁷ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance*, Yale University Press, 1985.

place, from time out of sync, and from allegiances that are ultimately misalignances. The misinformed tourist, no less than the "naive" local, may appear to be mis-informed when more appropriately their relation can be said to be mis-performed in an expression of their asymmetry.

In crafting performance experiences in environments that are not our "home," asymmetry is a central resource. But shaping asymmetric encounters – mistopian spaces – means accepting the full range of potential misperformances. We remain skeptically interested in mistopia, but we resist as much as possible the impulse to redefine it *post facto* as "success." What is interesting about mistopia as the space of asymmetric encounter is that the situation is by definition not subject to our approval.

Ric Allsopp Walking Backwards

We enter the future walking backwards.

—Paul Valéry¹

This paper suggests some ways in which the action and metaphor of walking (and looking) backwards might help us to think about performance as a temporary zone or project space. As a form of mis-performance, walking backwards – an action "contra naturam" and often associated with resistance, ridicule, reversal – disrupts and shifts our expectations and refocuses our modes and habits of attention.² The imaginal spaces generated through walking or looking backwards as strategies or tactics for situating performance suggest new, provisional forms of interaction and participation, temporary zones that in turn might lead to innovative forms and processes of working together. The view of art work and performance taken here – as I will discuss later – is unashamedly utopian in Walter Benjamin's sense,³ and locates utopia in the heart of the present moment as an imminent potential

¹ In the French original – "Nous entrons dans l'avenir à reculons" - Paul Valéry, "Variété 3" in *Oeuvres* Vol.1, Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), Paris 1957.

² I would like to thank Ed Scheer for reminding me of the rich comic vein of "funny walks" – in particular Max Wall, Spike Milligan, George Carl, Billy Dainty and John Cleese – which might well take this paper in another direction as it were. The following is from *The Guardian* in 2003 – the year after Spike Milligan died. "It is the place Spike Milligan labeled 'the world's only above-ground cemetery', but from today the New South Wales town of Woy Woy is celebrating the comedian in a week-long festival. A settlement of 10,000 people two hours' drive north of Sydney, Woy Woy has had a troubled history as the butt of Milligan's jokes since his parents moved there in the 1950s. [...] In keeping with Milligan's spirit, not everything has gone swimmingly for Spikefest since its inauguration last month. Plans to commemorate the 1956 Goon Show song, *I'm Walking Backwards for Christmas*, had to be kept modest because of fears the council would face lawsuits if anyone injured themselves while walking backwards: the 300 walkers in today's opening parade will be wearing their clothes backwards, but walking forwards." (David Fickling, "Town lampooned by Spike Milligan bends over backwards to laud him", *The Guardian*, 4 October 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/oct/04/australia.davidfickling> [accessed 25 April 2014]).

³ "For in [the future] every second was the narrow gate, through which the Messiah could enter." (Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, Pimlico, London 1999 [1940], p. 253-64).

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