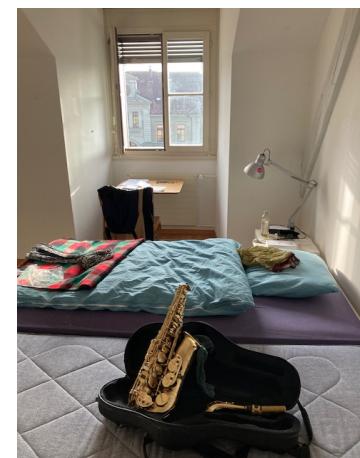


Final Report

Transtonations in residency.ch Bern/CH

Tanja Isbarn
November 2024



Collaboration in transition

What is transtonations?

The international multimedia project transtonations deals with phenomena such as transition, rhythm, and collaboration in flux. The project is set out in three phases with presentations in three different European countries in the period 2023-2026.

Starting off from a musical exercise—the étude #5 from Astor Piazzolla—I invited five artists from five European countries to react to the composition by this paradigm-changing musician of the 20th century. Important to me was to give the participants freedom to ponder, to meander, and to stroll during the act of interpreting. When approaching the artists, I made sure that this became very clear to them, as it is the essential ingredient of this ‘experiment.’

The first of three phases of the project was meant for the artists to indulge in the score and be affected by multi-layered impulses that build up through personal heritage, experience, sociological background, and the very medium used by each artist. The outcome of this development period was a presentation of six authentic positions next to each other, building up to a ‘conversation’ among the works and with the audience in Museum Eicas, Deventer, in 2023.

Preparation of phase #2

With the invitation by participating artist Peter Aerschmann (CH) to come together in the residency.ch—which he and Sophie Schmidt (a long-term friend) set up in 2012—the group got the opportunity to meet on a personal level and work on further concepts for the second phase of the project with more collaborative doings in the foreground.

Simon Whetham (UK), Marcus Appelberg (SE), Daniela Ehemann (DE), Ingeborg Entrop (NL), and Tanja Isbarn (DE/NL) thankfully accepted Peter’s offer.

The interpersonal between creative makers determines a very important ground on which a finding and building (of relationships, works, concepts) can grow and take shape. As the initiator of this project, I am convinced that a certain gardening (metaphorically) is as important as final results can be. The state of being on the road (*unterwegs*) to somewhere unknown affects the processes all participants go through in their very individual and their cooperative ways of working and expressing themselves. The landing at one particular spot, in this case the residency.ch in Bern/CH, was the starting point for yet another ‘foreign’ territory to explore.

General thoughts on group dynamics

The amalgamation of various backgrounds and different views onto essential patterns of daily life shapes a ‘community’ and can push a togetherness to limits. The group of participating artists took the chance to reside together at one location as an invitation to ‘play’. The very act of exploring space, time, and the other as freely and openly as possible can allow visualizations and audible acts of yet creations to come to form in an intuitive manner.

In times when digital communication and artificial intelligence are taking over many domains of human life, not only in practical terms but also in the creative field, the possibility to meet colleagues and to exchange and work on ideas in the ‘real’ and physically felt space while sharing time together almost becomes a luxury or at least a rare moment.

Writing this makes me think of an interview I heard while listening to radio SRF in Switzerland. The speaker quoted Frank Zappa’s well-known statement.

“Information is not knowledge. Knowledge is not wisdom. Wisdom is not truth. Truth is not beauty. Beauty is not love. Love is not music. Music is the best”.

Referring to Bertrand Russell’s thoughts on knowledge and truth, Zappa gave it a very individual twist. What charms me is the melting pot that is created by plunging almost any important element of human existence, stirring well and coming to the conclusion that music is by far the most important phenomenon of all. What an act of manifesting one’s own beliefs!

residency.ch period
01.11.-30.11.2024

Structure and build up procedures while we went

Due to other obligations and work commitments, three of the six artists resided in the apartment of residency.ch—located in the studio building and cultural center ‘PROGR’—in the first week. Simon Whetham welcomed me on the second day. On the fourth day, Simon and I went to the main station in Bern to pick up Marcus Appelberg, coming from Sweden. The ‘Treffpunkt’ (meeting point) at the station resembled a beautiful symbol for the project’s aim. Here we also welcomed Daniela Ehemann after her journeys, which started off in Berlin on the sixth day. Ingeborg arrived in the second week and found her way safely to the meeting point in order to also be accompanied to the residency. By that time Simon and Marcus had left Bern. A place of arrival and departure, such as a station, somehow mirrored the residency period and the river Aare. Just like airports, stations are in between places to me. Here, movement, desires, and duties with no halt or grounding aim but to get from one point in space and time to the other all flow parallel.

The act of food shopping, cooking, and eating together seemed to be a universal doing that created the basis for exchange and getting to know the other better. Also, the structure of a day had its rhythm when knowing that the kitchen happening would take place in the evening. This offered a framework for joint actions. Whereas in other hours of the day, all artists individually worked on their concepts for the transtonations project as well as on other necessary work-related affairs.

Time was spent together by walking through the city of Bern, perceiving the very particular sandstone green/gray color of the buildings (Bern is a UNESCO World Heritage site), visiting exhibitions at Paul Klee Centre, Kunstmuseum Bern, and historical buildings such as the Münster together. The river Aare always being a focal point of our attention as this crystal clear and rather fast streaming water runs along the city and very close by the residency. Her flow never stopped and will not in the near future with all the glacier ice melting rapidly, I dare to state.

Communication

In order to bring the openness of the structure of the togetherness to a more condensed state, the group set windows in time and created moments for joint meetings. On Sunday the 10th a group of four artists was present in the residency and organized a discussion meeting as well as a dinner to sharpen thoughts and share those with the others. Ingeborg Entrop and Peter Aerschmann were invited to attend digitally but unfortunately weren’t able to do so due to a rehearsal for a concert in the Netherlands and a different time zone (China). They were informed about the contents of the gathering via digital media the day after. An analogue meeting between Peter, Sophie Schmidt, Ingeborg, and me was possible after Peter’s return from a residency in China by the end of the second week. We met in the ‘Turnhalle’ (a former gym, now concert hall, bar, and restaurant in PROGR). This was a very valuable moment and so different from digital conversations, which very often end up being interrupted by technical faults. An experienced encounter of people in real life offers a ping-pong conversation of a special sort, leaving a three-dimensional impression and imprint in the brain.

Kaleidoscopic settings

Collaborative actions developed and were executed physically in different ways.

- Simon recorded sounds based on the étude #5 and played on the saxophone by Tanja. An intertwining with the bridges occurred down at the river Aare, creating stunning, echoing ‘voices.’
- Daniela brought pieces of charcoal for foot drawings developing while listening to and dancing to tango music. Tanja offered to be her tango partner and mirrored the steps Daniela choreographed on the spot. This happening took place on the opposite side of the river Aare from where the recordings of the sounds were taken the day before. Again Simon used his highly sensitive equipment to capture the movements of the feet on paper that was spread out on the

footpath along the river, whereas Marcus filmed the action with a standard smartphone.

- Ingeborg had organized to hire a cello from a local instrument builder and also had brought underwater recording equipment to Bern. This permitted her and Tanja to have a session of recordings at the Aare. While Ingeborg listened to the water's splashing and gurgling sounds via headphones, she improvised on the cello, inviting Tanja to react, simultaneously playing the saxophone. The location Ingeborg chose for this action was unique and situated further down the Aare from the previous places the group had worked at. Here, on the border of the old part of the city, former trading took place, which links to the history of the tango in Buenos Aires.

Work on future steps and actions for tt/ connecting and meeting with culturally involved people from Bern and Berlin

-A digital meeting between Johanna Rannula, director of the artist-run cultural center in Narva, Estonia, and Simon and Tanja took place on the third day. Simon had made acquaintance with Johanna through a residency in Narva this year. Possibilities were discussed but ended in the conclusion that the transtonations group wants to work on a fair basis, meaning that a balance between the effort and time of the makers and financial/facilitating support of the institution is a core condition for any action. Nevertheless, the group agreed to find Narva inspirational, with its location very close to the Russian border.

-An encounter with Eva-Maria Knüsel, main curator of Stadtgalerie, happened during the occasion of the first opening under her lead in the gallery space together with Marcus Appelberg. Eva-Maria Knüsel is interested in the transtonations project, and we will exchange information in the beginning of 2025.

- For the second week, I had been lucky to make an appointment with Nicholas Kerksieck from KornhausForum Bern prior to my departure to Bern. The meeting took place in the vast gallery area of this community-run venue for exhibitions and discourse on socially relevant topics. Mr. Kersieck, in his position of main curator for the past three years, has brought major changes to the programming in terms of actualization of the activities and thematic topics of the projects presented to the public. It was a very valuable meeting with a vivid exchange of 'collaborative ideas.' We will stay in touch.

-a meeting with the initiator of Zwitschermaschine, Stephan Kruhl, in Berlin was organized rather spontaneously by Daniela and extended my travels in the framework of the residency period for another week. The outcome so far is that Mr. Kruhl is interested in the project and would like to see a presentation of works and performances in his rooms. The costs could be paid through Senate culture funding for which we would have to apply. This is at present being discussed with the group as the fair play code needs to be complied with.

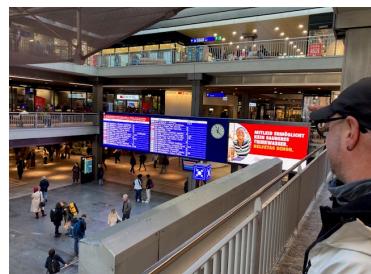
-I was able to widen my knowledge of church organs and their sounds while visiting one of the oldest playable instruments of this kind in the world, the Schwalbennestorgel (swallow's nest organ) in the Basilique de Valère, Sion/CH, guided by the lovely plantologist/mountaineer Barbara Keusch.

The residency.ch time was well perceived, and the connecting potential of a group residency is rated high by all participants.

I want to thank the Gerbrandy Foundation for her financial support of my travels and stays abroad in the framework of the transtonations residency period and the preparation of project phase #2. While closing this report, I want to quote the Nordic writer Jan Fosse

"To write is to listen."

Impressions



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