

OCTOPUSSY at home.

Imagine to be travelling right now. Not aimlessly, but because someone you do not know personally yet, invited you. You came in contact with this person through someone else.

While trying to find venues in various European cities where my musician friend could perform at, I had remembered different people through which I relate to these cities, without ever having been there. Relations as immediate as having lived with a Bulgarian couple in Vienna, or dating a Portuguese during my Erasmus exchange, or remembering the vividness of my Serbian roommate's friend who is Bosnian, would allow me to connect with local communities. Following these leads, I had began contacting all kinds of acquaintances to find out what's a good place to perform at – be it in Macedonia, Croatia, Poland or Italy. Finally, I would realize how many threads leading to all corners of the European Union I already held in my hands.

Following recommendations of all the people that came back to me, after receiving my message and listening to my friend's music, I would have outlaid a beautiful route for my friend to travel along throughout Europe. Various kinds of venues, hangouts, community centers, poetry clubs, clubs, bars, artist studios or private homes connected with me through a shared friend or interest in the same kind of music, and invited my friend to perform.

On tour, my friend would tell me about their experiences along the route, through messages. At home, but still intertwined with the organization, I would hear about how they were welcomed, when encountering their hosts for the first time, – mostly being picked up at a train or bus station, and brought to private homes, that were often shared with a bunch of other people –, how they were served with some special local foods and introduced to new friends. Each host had plans for the shared day and night to come. I would learn about the special characteristics of the hosts, their personalities, and daily routines. By hearing stories about encounters and reactions to their music, I would get a feeling for the atmosphere at the performance venue and their audience. I would know about flirts and disappointments happening throughout those short nights of personal experience.

If I had arranged a small fee beforehand, I would find out how difficult it was for most of the hosts to guarantee them.

The friendship with my friend would deepen with sharing their experiences. While learning about their adventures, I would also get to know of their fears and struggles. The taste of their way of life, – the pennilessness, unsettledness, and neediness, at times –, was bittersweet. Their workplace was set in social spheres of locals, spending their after-work hours there, to drink, mingle and be entertained. Coming from afar, the touring artist got

the attention of the night, and my friend would have to be fun and entertaining, with a professional input and emotional feedback. Even if introduced and welcomed by the host, my friend would feel heartbroken and lonely, or sad at times, looking for a calm place for retreat. The disappointment with small audiences, or inefficient fees, overshadowed some of those nights that lined along the route. In the end, my friend was traveling alone, and working for a place to stay and some drinks, spending each night as if it was special, while playing the same chords – for different people, at different places. What were they carrying along? What would hold their experience together and render this lonesome trail more meaningful?

Staying in touch with my friend, – virtually and emotionally –, I would get a sense of how their work and life experience depended on the inviting community. It made a difference for my friend to be welcomed and cared for, with the offer for professional exchange and personal appreciation. Supportive, I would wonder how to attract larger audiences and aim for higher fees, while realizing that most places I was connected with, – through friends and by recommendations –, were alternative places, built around individuals keeping their communities together with which they often shared long histories. Most hosts would earn money on the side, while running a cultural space at night, fueling a safe space for experimentation and international exchange. Despite their enthusiasm and liveliness they poured into each event to make it fun and special, the exhaustion of working for the community had to be counteracted. While the setup for organization and leadership was at risk, most times for a lack of funds or support, and therefore without prospects, they needed a sense of active participation in the building of something valuable that would guarantee perspective.

Relating to both parties, I would figure out that they lacked approval and commitment to the continuity of their activities. My friend's story developed without a sensation of belonging. Despite enjoying touring and meeting new people, – in the long run –, their energy, and self-esteem was under pressure. While the hosts had rooting in their own communities, they were fighting against disapproval and uprooting from outside forces, threatening their cultural and social activity. How would you divide between art and life, when its practice had become a mode of survival?

From afar, I had become a coordinate for the kind of experience my friend and the hosting community would share, preparing the encounter but also matching interests. Despite my physical absence, I would become entangled. The threads I had spun would thicken between all of us, and my own path would finally lead to the same venues and homes, meeting with the same people from my friend's story, reconnecting them through my own experience and art.

Now imagine, you would be traveling along those routes of your friend. You would arrive at a train or bus stop, recognizing the small red or blue car waiting for you. While driving to the home of your host, they would point out all kinds of sights, telling anecdotes and laying out plans for the coming days before your performance. All that you would see,

smell, and feel, would relate to your memories made together with your friend, who had come there before you. You would be given a key, and a handful advises where to have good coffees and drinks. Retracing your friend's path, you would have some other destinations to look for as well. At night you would meet up again, when your host would finish their day job. You would hang out on a public square or in their venue, and be introduced to the community, as OCTOPUSSY that was connecting them all. You held their threads in your hands, interlacing them while telling anecdotes and spending a night as if you were at home, following intuitive impulses, relaying emotions into a shared moment, to trigger new potential collaborations. How could you think together with them, without residing at their location?

Transforming into a mode of getting in touch as OCTOPUSSY on TOUR, I would learn new ways of creating continuity, – for my hosts, my friend and me. By speaking of past events or projecting into the future, I was diving into a stream of fleeting relations, – each of them fragile and unattached –, trying to retrace and consolidate them through the OCTOPUSSY way of spinning contacts. Reflecting on what it feels like to be with the locals in the same space, OCTOPUSSY would use empathy to open up, and intake. The different links that were spun throughout Europe in the last years would exert the existential force of having interest, in each other, the work, art and ideas of each other, and in the conditions of various lifestyles. The OCTOPUSSY trace was drawing a net, in which these interests could modify and connect.

While OCTOPUSSY was not looking back, little objects found while traveling would fill bags with props. Carrying them from one place to the other, OCTOPUSSY would slowly collect differences in the ways of life, tasting a common aspect. The potential for progress and change, in the organization of uncertain days, of uncertain futures and the investment of time and energy, was repressed. It needed a sense of growth that would align all those endeavors in retrospect. What traces would remain, and how would you take responsibility for your way of influencing paths and people, when your actions feel foreign or go unseen?

At the end of each trip, OCTOPUSSY would prepare a drink, to share with the participants, jamming all tastes. Offering a straw, OCTOPUSSY would suck from the same cup, in a most intimate physical exchange. While drinking together, we would be thinking together, and felt each other's wish to remain a moment in time that was seen and taken in, like a spice on the tongue, changing the perception, and leading into new directions of experience.

As for now touring artists are not on tour, and most venues are still closed, OCTOPUSSY has had time to digest some of her experiences and observations. Looking down from the balcony onto a usually quite lively square in front of the station, and looking out for modes of exchange and collaboration despite staying at home, OCTOPUSSY has observed, how a shift in the comprehension that communities are existential for survival, is possible but still easily repressed or missed. While individuals again are caring and intertwined, outlaying new daily routines to create a sense for life, most people feel unoccupied when not distracted by their work lives. To follow personal interests and to

create safe paths in life for all kinds of perspectives, orientations, needs, and ways of thinking, needs time and energy. Community work and cultural work is an important, life-enabling work, working towards progress, peace and mutual support. Currently, these kind of sociocultural endeavors are either professionally framed by institutions that have found approval, or otherwise happening in private realms, thus often lacking the attention to feel effective and valued. How would you publicly stand up for a change of perspective, giving it all your attention? Has public space become the essential venue to rehearse, critique and exchange?

Let's call out some toasts in these quiet times, to reconnect and get loud. Let's drink, and think together, how to uncover those many threads that relate back to the impacts you and I made for each other. Let's draw out new nets for those of us, who are paving paths for potential participation. Cheers to the ones of us that rehearse their opinion in public space, giving their attention to hope and empowerment of those who care for us! Cheers to all the difficulties that a life built on interest brings along, but also to all the fortune and warmth you and I experienced when caring for each other. Together we might be able to establish systems in which you and I could define collectively, what we want for a common future.

Persevere! Get loud, rehearse in public spaces, build new friendships, initiate new collaborations, stir new hopes to overcome anonymity and poverty, come visit and share your art, taste perspective through chat and phone with friends from all over the world, follow threads of relationships, reconnect with places, venues and communities of individuals that engaged you in the creation of cultural life, stay in touch, create daily routines for those who cannot yet imagine different paths, give support, make sense of time that is emptied from outside distractions, fight for revaluation and equalization, support those who enable change. Be change yourself. Stay in touch.

OCTOPUSSY on TOUR is the moniker and performance alter ego of visual artist Ayla Pierrot Arendt, born 1987, who lives and works in Frankfurt am Main. With this tactile, interactive, and adaptive live-performance Arendt has followed invitations between the concert venue and the Kunstverein since 2017, and thus re-traced threads of relationships formed along tours, she had organized for friend musicians Ohtakekohhan from Japan and Così e Così from Canada.

The OCTOPUSSY experience narrates a way how to connect and to collaborate based on common interests and overlapping paths, being sensitive and vulnerable in projecting alternative ways of building communities, offering support and changing perspectives. The OCTOPUSSY soundscapes are composed of spoken word fragments, electronic music sequences and digital image material, bringing together experiences of different realities of life. Music and soundscape was composed together with techno musician Fullruhm.

Ayla Pierrot Arendt is a container, combining video and live performance with installation. Arendt studied Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, and Choreography and Performance at the Institute for Applied Theatre studies in Giessen, DE. Since 2012 she has been creating so-called video-choreographies for the gallery and performance context.

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