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## **WHAT THE EGG!? – or: The Allegory of the Beach Susie Wang’s *The Hum* as theatre theoretical scenery**

Two women meet on a beach: Sabine, a Norwegian tourist, and Kim, a tourist as well, but a Swedish one (or maybe a Swedish-speaking Finnish tourist<sup>1</sup>). Together, they will hatch an egg – first assumed as a turtle-egg, but finally turning out to be something completely different. Sabine’s German partner Barni had warned her not to touch this egg. But now, he has swum out to the sea to find her a cola somewhere, persuaded by a blow job she gave him before (instead of the intercourse he tried to have with her). And compared to this kind of sex on the beach, Sabine’s encounter with Kim will get even more intimate.

This is, in short, what happens in *The Hum* – the first piece by the Norwegian theatre group Susie Wang from 2017.<sup>2</sup> Founded in the same year by Trine Falch (text and direction), Martin Langlie (sound and music), Mona Solhaug (acting) and Bo Krister Wallström (scenography), Susie Wang has produced five pieces up to now (after a couple of earlier fellow projects of its members).<sup>3</sup> And as regards *The Hum*, it is not only the group’s first piece in general. It is also the first part of Susie Wang’s ‘horror trilogy about human nature’<sup>4</sup>, which additionally consists of the productions *Mummy Brown* (*Mumiebrun*) from 2018, and *Burnt Toast* from 2020.<sup>5</sup> Last, in its entirety, this trilogy was shown at Black Box teater in Oslo in autumn 2021. Shortly before, *Licht und Liebe*, Susie Wang’s fourth piece from 2020, had been shown in Oslo as well, at Nationaltheatret. And this is also where the group’s fifth piece *The Look* was recently produced, whose premiere in April 2022 was still lying ahead, when the text at hand was in the making.

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<sup>1</sup> This text was originally supposed to become a part of an article for LUST rf, association for the development of the Swedish-language theatre in Finland. See Eiermann, A. (2023, 10. mai): A stranded dichotomy – or: The shallows between theatre and performance. *LUST rf (Långsiktig Utveckling av Svenskspråkig Teater)*. <http://www.lust.fi/2023/05/a-stranded-dichotomy-or-the-shallows-between-theatre-and-performance-by-andre-eiermann/>.

<sup>2</sup> I have seen *The Hum* on 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2021 at TOU Scene Stavanger (with Mona Solhaug as Sabine, Kjersti Aas Stenby as Kim, and Eivin Nilsen Salthe as Barni), and on 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 at Black Box teater Oslo (as well with Mona Solhaug as Sabine and Kjersti Aas Stenby as Kim, but with the original cast Kim Atle Hansen as Barni). Additionally, I refer to the videodocumentation of the piece’s showing on 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2018 at Dramatikkens Hus Oslo during Heddagene (with Mona Solhaug as Sabine, Mari Strand Ferstad as Kim, and Kim Atle Hansen as Barni).

<sup>3</sup> See Susie Wang (n.d.): <https://www.susiewang.no/>, retrieved on 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2022.

<sup>4</sup> This was how the trilogy was announced in a leaflet published by Susie Wang on occasion of the trilogy’s showings at Black Box teater in autumn 2021. Earlier, and on the group’s website still, it is called “Susie Wang’s trilogy about man and nature” – Susie Wang (n.d.): <https://www.susiewang.no/the-hum>; Susie Wang (n.d.): <https://www.susiewang.no/mummy-brown>; Susie Wang (n.d.): <https://www.susiewang.no/burnt-toast-engelsk-copy>, retrieved on 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2022).

<sup>5</sup> I have seen *Mummy Brown* (*Mumiebrun*) on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 at Black Box teater Oslo / Rom for Dans. Additionally, I refer to the videodocumentation of the piece’s showing on 07<sup>th</sup> of October 2018 at Rom for Dans. As regards *Burnt Toast*, I have seen it for the first time as an internal run through at Kilden Teater in Kristiansand on 01<sup>st</sup> of June 2021 (as the planned showings were cancelled due to the pandemic). I saw it again on 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of November at Black Box teater Oslo. Additionally, I refer to the videodocumentation of the piece’s showing on 19<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 at Black Box teater Oslo.

## The hate of the performance artist

Apropos ‘lying’ (understood in the word’s other meaning): All of Susie Wang’s pieces are ‘lying’, in a way, as they are deeply illusionistic – including deliberate forms of deception.<sup>6</sup> Marina Abramović, the *grande dame* of body and performance art, would therefore hate Susie Wang’s theatre – just like Erika Fischer-Lichte, the *grande dame* of German theatre studies, loves Abramović’s works as prime examples for what she describes as an ‘aesthetics of the performative’.<sup>7</sup> Because as Abramović has said in an interview about her MoMA-retrospective *The Artist is Present* in 2010: “[T]o be a performance artist, you have to hate theatre. Theatre is fake [...]. The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real.”<sup>8</sup> And even though the theatre scholar Fischer-Lichte has of course much less problems with theatre, she formulates a similar clear-cut dichotomy when she states: “[A]n aesthetics of the performative is to be regarded as an aesthetics of presence (Lehmann 1999:22), rather than of presence effects, and as the aesthetics of ‘appearing’ (Seel 2004), rather than of appearance.”<sup>9</sup>

In case of Susie Wang’s theatre, there are indeed a lot of things that are ‘not real’ in Abramović’s sense. And with regard to *The Hum*, her enumeration of fake things could be expanded by saying: The beach is not real, the sea is not real, the egg is not real, the sun is not real, the sun cream is not real (if it was, the actor playing Kim would probably not drink most of it). And as regards the emotions and the blood, Abramović’s wording could be applied directly on *The Hum*. Because neither are the emotions real – as for example expressed when Barni cries in the face of the sea in the beginning, or when Sabine spits Kim in the face while battling with her for the egg in the end. Nor is the blood real – which is used rather sparingly in *The Hum*, but much more lavishly in Susie Wang’s later pieces.

Fischer-Lichte would indeed put this into perspective, arguing that theatre is rooted in performance, and pointing out that the actors’ bodies, the things’ materiality, the mutual reactions between actors and spectators and so on, are of course real – and present. Nevertheless, she would have to admit, that besides such examples of presence and ‘appearing’ – and in contrast to her clear-cut dichotomy – quite a few presence effects and appearances are in the game as well. The egg, for example, becomes most effectively present when it approaches Sabine, seemingly moving on its own – an appearance, or let’s rather call it an illusion, which in fact is caused by a magnet moved under the stage floor. And such hidden, underground causes

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<sup>6</sup> See Eiermann, A. (2021): Der Illusion der Realität: Susie Wangs Theater. *Norsk Shakespearetidsskrift*, 2-3(2021), pp. 28-41.

<sup>7</sup> See Fischer-Lichte, E. (2008 [2004]): *The Transformative Power of Performance: A new aesthetics*. London, New York: Routledge.

<sup>8</sup> Abramović, M. (2010): ‘The knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real.’ – Robert Ayers in conversation with Marina Abramović. March 2010, [www.askeyfilledwithshootingstars.com/wordpress/?p=1197](http://www.askeyfilledwithshootingstars.com/wordpress/?p=1197), retrieved on 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2018. See also Eiermann, A. (2018): ‚I HATE THEATRE – IT’S JUST ILLUSION‘ – Eine Praktik des Scheins als kritische Praxis: Zur Ironisierung anti-illusionistischer Topoi in Iggy und Maïke Lond Malmborgs Performance *99 Words for Void*. In O. Ebert, E. Holling, N. Müller-Schöll, P. Schulte, B. Siebert & G. Siegmund (ed.), *Theater als Kritik: Theorie, Geschichte und Praktiken der Ent-Unterwerfung* (pp. 103-110). Bielefeld: transcript, here pp. 105-106.

<sup>9</sup> Fischer-Lichte: *The Transformative Power of Performance*, p. 101.

with illusionistic effects are characteristic for Susie Wang's theatre in general – as indicated above, this theatre is full of illusions, both obvious ones and such of a deceptive kind.<sup>10</sup>

### The echo of the cave

Abramović's and Fischer-Lichte's positions, both already more than a decade old, represent and reinforce a narrative which still is quite dominant in the common perception of contemporary theatre: The narrative of an anti-illusionistic progression since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to this narrative, the performing arts increasingly distance themselves from the notorious illusionistic theatre<sup>11</sup>, as it particularly developed from the Renaissance through the bourgeois era. Usually, this illusionistic theatre is criticized and devaluated as manipulatory, seductive, misleading, restrictive, or even sort of imprisoning in the context of this narrative. And the prototypical conceptualization of this 'fake' theatre, as Abramović puts it, is Plato's Allegory of the Cave, in which bound and passive spectators can only watch the delusive shadows of the real things on the wall of a dark den.<sup>12</sup> That Plato, similar to Abramović, despises such delusive appearances, gets particularly clear when he prohibits deception and lying (which is the same for him) in his *Politeia* – except for lies and deceptions directed at enemies and lunatics, or in form of "the tales of mythology"<sup>13</sup>.

Susie Wang couldn't care less about such prohibitions and pejorative assessments of illusion and deception, as they still echo in the common discourse about contemporary theatre. All the more, the group cares about calling such echoes into question – exactly by realizing illusion and deception at the highest stage. And with *The Hum*, Susie Wang opens its oeuvre straightaway by realizing a kind of platonic 'shadow theatre' that depicts precisely the opposite of the Allegory of the Cave: A bright beach, on which the sunbathing tourists are spectators with a free and open view over the sea and straight into the universe, from where the sun directly shines onto them.

In other words: *The Hum* proposes an Allegory of the Beach. And thereby, it opposes Plato's Allegory of the Cave exactly by realizing, with illusionistic means, a scenery which resembles what Plato himself describes when speculating about how the release of the cave's inhabitants from their illusionistic chains would look like – just with a little difference. Because the 'release', as Plato describes it, is still a quite forced one. The spectator in his description "is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he is forced into the presence of the sun"<sup>14</sup>. The 'spectators' in *The Hum*, on the contrary, which deceive the piece's

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<sup>10</sup> By combining these forms of illusion, Susie Wang challenges not least the understanding of 'aesthetic illusion', as conceptualized by the corresponding theories from the Age of Enlightenment. See Eiermann: *Der Illusion er realitet: Susie Wangs teater*, p. 28. For a more detailed explanation of this challenge with regard to other examples of contemporary performing art, see Eiermann, A. (2018): *TO DO AS IF – Realitäten der Illusion im zeitgenössischen Theater*. In Eiermann, A. (ed.), *TO DO AS IF – Realitäten der Illusion im zeitgenössischen Theater* (p. 7-28). Frankfurt/Main et al.: Peter Lang.

<sup>11</sup> See also Eiermann: *Der Illusion er realitet: Susie Wangs teater*, pp. 28-31.

<sup>12</sup> See Plato (1998 [360 B.C.E.]): *The Republic*. Book VII (no pagination).

[https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0007](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h.htm#link2H_4_0007), retrieved on 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 2022. For a source with pagination, see the German translation: Platon (1958 [360 B.C.E.]): *Der Staat*. Stuttgart: Reclam, pp. 327-332. As regards the relation between Plato's Allegory of the Cave and 20<sup>th</sup> century anti-illusionism, see also Eiermann: *Der Illusion er realitet: Susie Wangs teater*, p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> Plato: *The Republic*, end of Book II (no pagination). See also Platon: *Der Staat*, p. 158.

<sup>14</sup> Plato: *The Republic*, Book VII (no pagination). See also Platon: *Der Staat*, p. 329.

actual spectators right from the beginning by sitting in the auditorium and pretending to be such actual spectators themselves, leave their ‘passive’ state behind on their own. They find their way onto the beach and into the ‘presence of the sun’ independently, crossing the border between auditorium and stage not due to force, but in a very casual way. This border is anyway rather a threshold in *The Hum*, as it is blurred from the beginning: The auditorium is not a kind of ‘dark cave’ opposed to an illuminated spectacle. The ‘sun’ – depicted by a central spotlight facing the audience – lights up both stage and auditorium in the same way. And when the actors who play the ‘spectators’ Barni and Sabine enter the stage (the actor who plays Kim enters later in another way), they first rather expand the auditorium onto the stage than reinforce the demarcation between the two areas. This reinforcement follows later, though, when Barni, while Sabine gives him the blow job, turns around to check if they are unobserved. Because then, the actor playing him looks at the actual spectators, but pretends they weren’t there – just like Denis Diderot recommended it when introducing his metaphor of the *grand mur*<sup>15</sup>, better known as the notorious ‘fourth wall’, one of the basic ingredients of illusionistic theatre.

### The persistence of the past

As Trine Falch has described it herself, this transition from the auditorium to the stage – which both sort of makes the stage an auditorium itself and results in the re-erection of the ‘fourth wall’ – was in fact “a kind of farewell to the audience and the relational and facing form which we had practiced before.”<sup>16</sup> In particular, this refers to the form practiced by the legendary Norwegian performance group Baktruppen, of which both she and Bo Krister Wallström are former members.<sup>17</sup>

This farewell, though, must not be misunderstood as a simple break with this form – which is closely associated with Hans-Thies Lehmann’s term ‘postdramatic theatre’, since he mentioned Baktruppen’s work as one of the examples of it in his homonymous book from 1999 (which Fischer-Lichte refers to in her statement quoted above).<sup>18</sup> Admittedly, the farewell might seem like such a break when seen in relation to the following statement, which Falch formulated in a lecture from 2016: “After many years in the so-called postdramatic theatre, I now try to find ways to re-enter fiction and create a neodramatic theatre. [...] I’m tired of the

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<sup>15</sup> See Diderot, D. (1771 [1758]): *De la Poésie dramatique*. In *Oeuvres de théâtre de M. Diderot: avec un discours sur la poésie dramatique* (pp. 227-394). Paris: La Veuve Duchesne and Delalain, p. 301, retrieved on 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2022 from <https://archive.org/details/uvresdethatred02dide/page/226/mode/2up>.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted from an excerpt of a rapport about *The Hum*, which Trine Falch has sent me in an e-mail – Falch, T. (2021): Personal communication (e-mail from 07<sup>th</sup> of March). My translation from Norwegian: “Dette var et slags farvel til publikum og den relasjonelle og henvendte formen vi hadde praktisert før”. In the same e-mail, she pointed out the detail regarding the re-erection of the ‘fourth wall’.

<sup>17</sup> The title of an anthology about Baktruppen even calls this form ‘performance art’. See Arntzen, K.O. & Eeg-Tverbakk, C. (ed.) (2009): *Performance Art by Baktruppen – first part*. Oslo: Kontur Forlag.

<sup>18</sup> See Lehmann, H.-T. (2006 [1999]): *Postdramatic Theatre*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 24 & p. 120. See also Lehmann, H.-T. (2009): Good Memory. In Arntzen & Eeg-Tverbakk, *Performance Art by Baktruppen* (pp. 39-40). In the latter text, Lehmann doesn’t apply the term ‘postdramatic theatre’ to Baktruppen. But in the same anthology, Knut Ove Arntzen quotes what Lehmann writes about them in *Postdramatic Theatre*. See Arntzen, K.O. (2009): Baktruppen going beyond aesthetics toward a space for living – an essay on Baktruppen’s first decade 1986-1996/97. In Arntzen & Eeg-Tverbakk, *Performance Art by Baktruppen* (pp. 27-37), here p. 29.

postmodern, postdramatic deconstructive fragmented presentations of the world.”<sup>19</sup> But like the name ‘Baktruppen’ ironically refers to the term ‘avant-garde’<sup>20</sup>, Falch uses the term ‘neodramatic’ with an ironic wink, satirizing trendy forms of branding in the performing arts context. And in the same lecture, she also explained that “Baktruppen could not exist without a traditional, bourgeois, mimetic theatre”, as likewise “[t]he neodramatic theatre cannot be new without bringing with it certain qualities from the old postdramatic times”.<sup>21</sup>

This corresponds quite exactly to an aspect which is crucial for Lehmann’s understanding of postdramatic theatre – but often gets overlooked due to the term’s superficial applications and inflationary use. Because like Falch points out that the old lingers on in the new, Lehmann points out that the ‘post’ in ‘postdramatic’ doesn’t imply the end of the dramatic. “‘After’ drama”, he writes, “means that it lives on as a structure – however weakened and exhausted – of the ‘normal’ theatre: as an expectation of large parts of its audience, as a foundation for many of its means of representation, as a quasi automatically working norm of its drama-turgy.”<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, Lehmann’s discourse is in fact much less impressed by the anti-illusionistic narrative as usually assumed (and as not least implied by the way Fischer-Lichte refers to his discourse). Even though his description of a postdramatic theatre indeed contains several statements that can support this assumption, Lehmann is, when he goes into detail regarding illusion, even critical about this anti-illusionistic narrative. As the chapter *Jenseits der Illusion*<sup>23</sup> (Beyond illusion) and particularly the sections *Illusionsschichten*<sup>24</sup> (Layers of illusion) and *Illusionsmaschine*<sup>25</sup> (Illusion machine) show, Lehmann doesn’t exclude illusion from postdramatic aesthetics at all. “The opposition illusion-disillusion”<sup>26</sup>, he clearly states, is “for the understanding of the postdramatic theatre useless”<sup>27</sup>, since illusion comprises more than only the “concretization of a fictional world”<sup>28</sup>.

These aspects of Lehmann’s discourse are usually even more overlooked than his description of the dramatic tradition’s persistence alongside postdramatic theatre. Particularly, this is the case in the context of his book’s international perception. And the reason for this is a fact which itself can be regarded as quite symptomatic for the enduring dominance of the anti-illusionistic narrative: the fact that the above-mentioned chapter and the sections on illusion have been excluded from the book’s English translation.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Falch, T. (2016, 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> of March): Lecture at Seminar About the Performer [foredrag]. Seminar om utøverrollen, Oslo Internasjonale Teaterfestival. Videodokumentation retrieved on 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from <https://vimeo.com/166103585>.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed description of this name’s ironic character, see Arntzen: Baktruppen going beyond aesthetics toward a space for living, p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. For a more detailed description of the relation between Baktruppen and Susie Wang, see Eiermann: Der Illusion er realitet: Susie Wangs teater, pp. 29-30.

<sup>22</sup> Lehmann, H.-T. (2006 [1999]): *Postdramatic Theatre*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 27. See also Eiermann: Der Illusion er realitet: Susie Wangs teater, p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> See Lehmann, H.-T. (2005 [1999]): *Postdramatisches Theater* (3rd revised edition). Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag der Autoren, pp. 185-193.

<sup>24</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 190-192.

<sup>25</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 413-415.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192. My translation from German: “Die Opposition Illusion-Desillusion [...]”.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185. My translation from German: “[F]ürs Verständnis des postdramatischen Theaters unbrauchbar”.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191. My translation from German: “Konkretisation einer fiktiven Welt”.

<sup>29</sup> See also Eiermann: Der Illusion er realitet: Susie Wangs teater, p. 31.

Against this background, it becomes clear that Susie Wang's theatre is not that far apart from postdramatic theatre as it may seem at first sight – and that the group's ways to re-enter fiction have their points of origin in a postdramatic past. As the beginning of *The Hum* shows, this past is not at all isolated from the present by an unbreachable gorge. Instead, there is a rather smooth way from this past to the present, and it just needs a few easy steps from the auditorium onto the stage to go it. The farewell from the past thus appears at the same time as a kind of welfare for it in the present. It's a care that doesn't care about a solipsistic notion of the contemporary (in which 'care' has recently become a trendy catchphrase itself). Susie Wang even explicitly criticizes such a notion. As Falch has put it in the lecture cited above: "The contemporary promises nothing, remembers nothing, it is a demented forever young kind of time, continuously pointing at itself repeating: This is the time, this is the time."<sup>30</sup> And the program text about *The Hum* begins with a very similar formulation, adding that, in this kind of time, "the past is forgotten and the future is dangerous."<sup>31</sup>

Susie Wang, on the contrary, cares about both the past and the future. And as regards the past, *The Hum* even features – with Sabine and Kim – personifications of both the 'traditional, bourgeois, mimetic theatre' which Baktruppen, according to Falch, could not have existed without, and the 'old postdramatic times', which make Susie Wang's theatre new by passing on 'certain qualities' to it, as Falch put it.

### **The personifications of the past(s)**

Obviously, Sabine is the personification of the former: the past of a traditional, bourgeois, mimetic – or, in short: dramatic – theatre. Already her relationship with Barni clearly roots in a bourgeois concept: That he swims out to the sea in search for a cola, while she stays 'at home' on the beach and hatches the egg, corresponds to the classic role allocation in the nuclear family, as idealized in the bourgeois era. And as regards her relation to Kim, Sabine first tries to keep her at arm's length – just like bourgeois theatre's conceptualization of the 'fourth wall' keeps spectators and actors apart.

Kim, in contrast, is much less reserved. In fact, she turns out to be quite intrusive and transgressive – not least on the bodily level. After arriving on the beach, she first disturbs the tranquility in which Sabine is dozing by addressing her with questions (or: by calling her state of things into question, so to speak). And despite Sabine's signals of disinterest, she continues trying to embroil her into a conversation – an endeavor in which she will eventually succeed. She even manages to turn her intrusive appearance into a trustworthy one, which is so convincing that Sabine confides the egg to her while she is taking a swim. But during Sabine's absence, Kim's appearance will change again: From the ostensibly helpful egg-sitter, she transforms into a kind of excessive fertility dancer, acting on the egg with copulatory movements. And when she finally even inseminates the egg by a drop of sperm-like saliva<sup>32</sup>, she reminds all the more of the transgressive body practices, which not least postdramatic

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<sup>30</sup> Falch: Lecture at Seminar About the Performer.

<sup>31</sup> My translation from Norwegian: "[D]er fortida er glemt og framtida er farlig." Program text about *The Hum*, retrieved from <https://www.touofficial.com/program/?id=12127> on 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2021.

<sup>32</sup> This detail was not part of the piece's early version, but was added later.

theatre forms have adopted from body and performance art<sup>33</sup> (a fact which Abramović, by the way, disapproves of in the cited interview).

In fact, Kim's intrusive behavior challenges Sabine's reserved attitude not less than postdramatic theatre forms have challenged the 'normal' theatre, to put it like Lehmann. Kim's transgressions disturb not only the tranquil and secluded coziness Sabine had ensconced herself in on the sunny beach. They also muddle up the heteronormative nest of Sabine's relationship with Barni. Because by means of embroiling Sabine in the mentioned conversation, Kim eventually also seduces her into a homoerotic affair. And in this context, Kim will not only claim the egg as her offspring – like both Lehmann and Fischer-Lichte claim that postdramatic theatre respectively an aesthetics of the performative sort of emphasizes theatre's essence.<sup>34</sup> The affair's dynamic will also attach the egg firmly to Sabine's crotch, where it finally appears as a kind of oversized clitoris, when it is intensely rubbed by Kim – just like certain transgressive performative practices try to tease the most intimate excesses out of theatre's private parts.

But despite her obvious arousal, Sabine doesn't lose control completely. Before she reaches the climax, she interrupts Kim's hand job by saying: "Jeg lurer på hvor det ble av Barni." (I wonder where Barni is got to.) – which is a good exemplification of Susie Wang's approach to explore "the female body as an excavation field" by carrying out "a kind of opposite archeology, where the past finds man and draws her down."<sup>35</sup> Because the bourgeois, heteronormative past of Sabine's former relationship finds her exactly in the moment when she gets most high on her homoerotic affair with her postdramatic lover Kim. To use Lehmann's wording, this past 'lives on as a structure – however weakened and exhausted'. And indeed, it draws Sabine down from her height again (a bit similar to how Plato's cave-dweller is dragged up into the presence of the sun). In view of how the ways of highlighting the human body in transgressive performative practices and postdramatic theatre forms often less brake with precedent than rather perpetuate and intensify theatre's age-old anthropocentrism, this is quite telling.

Finally, Barni even returns to the fold for real. He comes back from the sea with the desired cola and reunites with Sabine, after Kim has disappeared into an abysmal hole in the ground. This hole – quite allegorical in itself – opened up due to the two women's battle for the egg, which broke out when Sabine broke up with Kim after their 'coitus interruptus' (which came too late anyway, as Kim had already inseminated the egg before). "Du skal holde deg langt unna oss!" (You shall keep far away from us!), Sabine shouts at Kim in this quarrel, spitting her into the face and adding: "Det er mitt egg!" (This is my egg!). Unfortunately, this heated reclaim induces labor. And like the egg had appeared as an oversized clitoris before, what then appears as a kind of gigantic mouth of uterus, opening up during that labor right underneath Sabine and the egg, is that abysmal hole in the ground.

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<sup>33</sup> See the chapter 'Performance' in Lehmann: *Postdramatic Theatre*, pp. 134-144.

<sup>34</sup> For both, this essence is the presence of actors and spectators in a shared 'here and now'. Lehmann writes for example: "Theatre means the collectively spent and used up lifetime in the collectively breathed air of that space in which the performing and the spectating take place" (*Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 17). Fischer-Lichte puts it like that: "The bodily co-presence of actors and spectators enables and constitutes performance. For a performance to occur, actors and spectators must assemble to interact in a specific place for a certain period of time" (*The Transformative Power of Performance*, p. 32).

<sup>35</sup> Susie Wang (n.d.): <https://www.susiewang.no/mummy-brown>, retrieved on 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2022.

By backing off from Kim and going back into heteronormative conditions, Sabine is reduced to the reproductive function, so to speak. And now, found in an even more drastic way by the past of her relationship with Barni, she gets, together with ‘her’ egg, literally drawn down by this past – down into the abysmal hole that pulls the rug out from under her. At least, she manages to escape from it again. But what she doesn’t manage to escape from, is what then slips away from this hole as well, namely the uncanny, demonic offspring, which down in the hole has hatched from the egg: not a cute turtle-infant at all, but a naked, skinny, white-haired woman with claws.<sup>36</sup>

In the first version of *The Hum*, this offspring follows the exhausted Sabine, ending up in her bosom like a vampire-like suckling – and this is the nuclear family which Barni will find when he returns in the end. In the piece’s current version, though, the creature disappears into the sea. Thereby, it meets Barni on his way back. And it almost impedes his return by attacking him, as the bloody scratch on his back will show when he finally manages to rescue himself to the beach and into Sabine’s arms. But in both cases, the reestablished relationship of the couple is no longer the same. Whether the creature stays with them or not, it marks their relationship by a blemish. The old horror-formula ‘take a happy place and take the happy out of it’, which Susie Wang uses as guideline<sup>37</sup>, seems to be applied here to the end of *The Hum*: In a way, it reminds of a happy end, but the ‘happy’ is taken out of it. And actually, this end is even not just not happy. In fact, it’s neither an end at all. Or more precisely: It is the end of *The Hum*, but not the end of the tourist couple’s story. Because Sabine and Barni will return in *Licht und Liebe*.

Thus, what happens in *The Hum* doesn’t stay in *The Hum*. In the same way as the dramatic and the postdramatic past coalesce in the piece’s present and give birth to their chimeric offspring, this has consequences for the future – a future in which Sabine and Barni will meet similar challenges again, which likewise have to be handled with care. Thus, as Sabine and Kim can be regarded as personifications of different pasts, the offspring that hatches from the egg can be regarded as a personification of an alien, still unknown future.

### **The ‘predramatic’ horizon and the ‘postspectacular’ waves**

But more about the future later. First, once again back to the beginning of *The Hum* – i.e. to a past in which what happens in the piece still is a future for both the tourist couple and the piece’s actual spectators (at least if they see it for the first time). Because when looking back at that beginning, it becomes clear that *The Hum*, understood as an Allegory of the Beach, in fact even looks back much further into the past than just back to the ‘old postdramatic times’ and the slightly older ones of ‘traditional, bourgeois, mimetic’, and dramatic theatre. The view over the sea, which is introduced when the spectating actors (or acting spectators) share it with the actual spectators, additionally reminds of a much older theatre. And in a book not that much older than *Postdramatic Theatre*, namely *Theater und Mythos (Theatre and Myth)* from 1991, Lehmann describes this theatre, namely the theatre of ancient Greece, as ‘predramatic’ – but

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<sup>36</sup> This creature is played by Janne Aas.

<sup>37</sup> This is for example mentioned in a description of Susie Wang’s theatre in an application text – Susie Wang (2020): Personal communication (compilation of excerpts from project descriptions and application texts, attached to an e-mail from 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2020). Thanks to Trine Falch for giving me access to it.



already then in relation to his description of a postdramatic theatre, which according to him “alludes in a peculiar way [...] to the (European) beginnings of theatre.”<sup>38</sup>

“As with the polis,” Lehmann writes regarding these beginnings in Athens, “the theatre stands in the closest context with the surrounding natural scenery, imagined as enwrought by divine forces. [...] Beyond the Skene, the view reached into the wideness as far as the horizon in the direction of the sea.”<sup>39</sup> And as regards the sea in particular, he explicates in relation to the cultural self-perception of Athens:

For the theatre is the sea, like the scenic conditions in general, an essential element of the ‘opsis’: beyond the theatre facility grove, landscape, and on the horizon the sea, over which, as one assumed, also the god Dionysus once had come. The sea: Real metaphor of the expansive world power, the site of exploration, conquest, of course also of danger.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, “[a] small and intimate space”, as Lehmann also points out, “‘speaks’ differently to the spectator than the huge theatre facility of Athens”<sup>41</sup>. And in addition to the “enormous dimensions” of that facility itself, “the into immeasurability widened space [must have made] the contrast between the [...] exposed, isolated, and against the background of the nature panorama vanishing small, lost human body [all the more palpable]”<sup>42</sup>. In short: This widened space literally must have put the human being into perspective in relation to its environment.

This is exactly something which Susie Wang is interested in as well. As Trine Falch has put it with regard to the sun’s role in Susie Wang’s theatre<sup>43</sup>: “[W]e have thought [...] that the sun puts the human into a distinct relation to the world [...]. We try to strive towards a more animist stage universe, where the humans/characters are not alone with steering the action.”<sup>44</sup> That the view over the sea in *The Hum* is, at the same time, the view into the sun, is particularly fitting here. And it is not less fitting that ‘the into immeasurability widened space’ fits in ‘a small and intimate space’ in this piece, i.e. in a usual black box.

Of course, the sea comes closer due to that. It actually is a ‘skene’ itself: a construction hanging from the ceiling, covered with silvery shimmering horizontal lines of wavy cloth – with openings between them, mostly covered by the way they are sued and folded, through

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<sup>38</sup> Lehmann, H.-T. (1991): *Theater und Mythos. Die Konstitution des Subjekts im Diskurs der antiken Tragödie*. Stuttgart: Metzler, p. 2, my translation from German: “berührt es sich [...] eigentümlich mit den (europäischen) Anfängen des Theaters”.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 31, my translation from German: “Wie mit der Polis, so steht das Theater im engsten Zusammenhang mit der als von göttlichen Mächten durchwaltet vorgestellten Naturlandschaft ringsumher. [...] Über die Skene hinweg ging der Blick in die Weite bis zum Horizont in Richtung Meer”.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., my translation from German: “Für das Theater stellt das Meer, wie überhaupt die landschaftlichen Gegebenheiten, ein wesentliches Element der ‘Opsis’ dar: über die Theateranlage hinaus Hain, Landschaft und am Horizont das Meer, über das, wie man meinte, auch der Gott Dionysos einst gekommen war. Das Meer: Realmetapher der ausgreifenden Weltmacht, der Ort von Erkundung, Eroberung, freilich auch der Gefahr”.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 30, my translation from German: “Ein kleiner und intimer Raum ‘spricht’ anders zum Zuschauer als die große athenische Theateranlage”.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 31, my translation from German: “gewaltige Dimensionen” & “der ins Unermeßliche geweitete Raum [mußte] den Kontrast um so fühlbarer machen zwischen dem [...] exponierten, isolierten und vor dem Hintergrund des Naturpanoramas verschwindend kleinen, verlorenen Menschenkörper”.

<sup>43</sup> See Eiermann: *Der Illusion er realitet: Susie Wangs teater*, pp. 32-33, pp. 36-37, p. 39.

<sup>44</sup> Falch: Personal communication (e-mail from 07<sup>th</sup> of March). My translation from Norwegian: “[V]i [har] tenkt [...] at sola setter mennesket i tydelig relasjon til verden [...]. Vi forsøker å etterstrebe et mer animistisk sceneunivers, der menneskene/karakterene ikke er alene om å styre handlingen”.

which the actors can dive away and bop up again. This sea is not just ‘on the horizon’. Quite the contrary: The horizon is on that sea. It is the scenographic sea-level horizon, beyond which the view reaches into a fictional wideness as immeasurable as the actual one Lehmann describes. Understanding *The Hum* as an Allegory of the Beach, it is exactly this horizon which is the threshold between theatre and theory. And the view into the fictional wideness beyond it is, as already mentioned, a view into the universe, with the sun as the closest focal point.

Susie Wang thus manages to ‘speak’ the language of an ‘into immeasurability widened space’ in a black box’s intimacy. This includes that the sea, similar to Lehmann’s description, is also in *The Hum* in fact enwrought by certain forces. And even though the human bodies appear against this background in a different way than in front of the nature panorama of ancient Athens, they are in quite a similar way put into perspective in relation to their environment.

Especially the aspect of the human body as vanishing becomes palpable right in the beginning of *The Hum*. Because before the actors of Barni and Sabine enter the stage, another performer enters it first – but just to vanish again straightaway: Coming from the audience as well, she first takes off her clothes, except for a swimsuit. Then, leaving her clothes behind on the beach as her appearance’s vestige, she dives into the sea. And throughout the rest of the piece, it is this performer who operates the undulation of the sea’s surface, swaying it like a big swing, hidden underneath and behind it as the invisible cause of this visible effect – or: as the force this sea is enwrought by.

*The Hum* thus begins with the (dis)appearance of ‘the sea’ itself, as this performer’s role is indicated in the credits.<sup>45</sup> Like the piece’s references to predramatic, dramatic and postdramatic pasts appear in form of present human bodies which sort of personify these pasts, the disappearing of the first of these bodies shows that *The Hum* also features characteristics of an ‘aesthetics of absence’, as for example theatre director and composer Heiner Goebbels has called it<sup>46</sup> – and not least of what I have described as a ‘postspectacular theatre’.<sup>47</sup>

For its literal ‘act of creation’<sup>48</sup>, Susie Wang has, with the performer playing the sea, managed “to find an actor who” – as Goebbels once put it when describing what kind of actors he particularly appreciates – “is willing to disappear.”<sup>49</sup> And this performer is not only willing to disappear in favor of the sea’s undulation. Due to this undulation, the sea also steals the show from the human who appears next, namely Barni. More precisely: Its waves literally ‘steal’ his glasses, which he had put too close to the shore – or: they steal, in a quite postspectacular way (and as quite postspectacular waves), this present human body’s spectacle(s).

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<sup>45</sup> This performer is usually Bente Alice Westgård. For the showings in Stavanger in October 2021, she was replaced by Rannei Grenne.

<sup>46</sup> See Goebbels, H. (2012): *Ästhetik der Abwesenheit. Texte zum Theater*. Berlin: Theater der Zeit. See also Siegmund, G. (2006): *Abwesenheit. Eine performative Ästhetik des Tanzes*. Bielefeld: transcript.

<sup>47</sup> See Eiermann, A. (2009): *Postspektakuläres Theater – Die Alterität der Aufführung und die Entgrenzung der Künste*. Bielefeld: transcript.

<sup>48</sup> For a more detailed description of *The Hum* as Susie Wang’s ‘act of creation’, see Eiermann: *Der Illusjon er realitet: Susie Wangs teater*, p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> Goebbels, H. (2005): *Der Raum als Einladung – der Zuschauer als Ort der Kunst*. In Lammert, A. et al. (ed.), *Topos Raum: Die Aktualität des Raumes in den Künsten der Gegenwart*. Nürnberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, p. 257. Goebbel’s complete formulation is: “Try to find an actor who does nothing – or is willing to disappear.” My translation from German: “Finden Sie mal einen Schauspieler, der nichts macht – oder zum Verschwinden bereit ist”.

Though, while they carry these spectacles away and out to the sea, Barni receives support by his rearguard – or: by his ‘*baktrupp*’. An additional human body appears, as Sabine now arrives on the beach. But in a way, the sea steals the show from her as well. Because exactly when she starts to establish her presence by making herself comfortable on the beach, the waves swallow the spectacles. And this does not only attract the spectators’ attention more than the present human bodies do at this moment (as the laughter in the audience shows). It also happens a bit more than eight minutes after the spotlight depicting the sun had started to light up in the beginning – as the first visual event in *The Hum*.<sup>50</sup> This timing is of course a detail which, most probably, no spectator notices during the performance. But it is interesting nevertheless, as the timespan corresponds quite exactly to how long it takes for the sunlight to reach the earth. Regarding the light in which Barni and Sabine now arrived to bath their present human bodies, this means that it left the sun when these bodies were still absent on the beach. In this sense, the disappearance of the spectacles in the sea’s postspectacular waves also steals the show from these present human bodies by putting them in the light of their past absence.

### **The spectacle of the contemporary – or: the contemporary spectacle**

In this way, Susie Wang’s Allegory of the Beach counters Plato’s Allegory of the Cave one more time. More precisely: Stealing the spectacle(s) from the present human bodies’ counters a younger (and as regards its effects relatively contemporary) version of Plato’s allegory, as it appears in form of situationist Guy Debord’s anti-illusionistic description of a ‘society of the spectacle’.<sup>51</sup> In his homonymous book *La Société du Spectacle* from 1967, Debord criticizes the society of his time as a kind of illusionistic theatre, in which the circulation of superficial images transforms human beings into passive spectators and blocks immediate social relations.<sup>52</sup> His demand is therefore, as the denomination ‘situationist’ implies, to create situations, in which everybody involved is an active participant. And this demand has a lot in common with the call for bodily (co-)presence, as it is characteristic for both Abramović’s performance art and Fischer-Lichtes ‘performative aesthetics’ – as well as to a certain extent, although in a more differentiated way, for Lehmann’s discourse about a ‘postdramatic theatre’.

But what this call – and its echo in the discourse about contemporary theatre – overlooks, is that the spectacle has fundamentally changed since Debord first described it. What once may have been forms of resistance against it, has in the meantime lost its critical character, as the spectacle has appropriated and assimilated exactly these forms. Moreover, the contemporary echo of the Debordian “critique of the spectacle” – as philosopher Juliane Rebentisch puts it – is even “doubly untimely.”<sup>53</sup> It does not only overlook that this critique’s “central motifs” – particularly its “demand [...] for more immediate ‘relationality’ in the

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<sup>50</sup> As regards this timing, I refer to the videodocumentation of the piece’s showing on 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2018 at Dramatikkens Hus Oslo. It is very likely that the exact point in time varies a bit in each performance.

<sup>51</sup> As regards the relation between Plato’s Allegory of the Cave and Debord’s description of the spectacle, see also Eiermann: *Der Illusion er realitet: Susie Wangs teater*, p. 38. Regarding the following remarks in relation to Debord’s discourse, see *ibid.*, pp. 37-38, and Eiermann: *Postspektakuläres Theater*, pp. 15-18.

<sup>52</sup> See Debord, G. (2014 [1967]): *The Society of the Spectacle*. Berkeley CA: Bureau of Public Secrets.

<sup>53</sup> Rebentisch, R. (2007): *Spectacle. Texte zur Kunst*, no. 66, retrieved on 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from <https://www.textezurkunst.de/66/spektakel/>.

context of art” – “have in the meantime been adopted by the opposing side.”<sup>54</sup> It also “participates in the utopia, problematic in itself, of social authenticity” – “problematic because it bears latent or manifest traits of authoritarian collectivization even where it conceives of itself as democratic.”<sup>55</sup>

The present human bodies appearing in *The Hum* literally turn their backs on this problematic utopia of social authenticity. Instead of entering a face-to-face-encounter with the spectators – which sort of is this utopia’s epitome in contemporary theatre – they look the same way as them, and thus away from them over the sea and into the sun. Particularly that the sea additionally steals the show from these bodies, can be seen as a way of quite critically relating to the demand for immediate relationality and (co-)presence – and to the assumption that these would still critically relate to the spectacle. *The Hum* sort of turns the famous slogan ‘*Sous les pavés, la plage!*’ (‘Beneath the pavement, the beach!’) around, as it is associated with the situationists’ involvement into the French unrest of May 1968. The ‘pavement’ in this slogan epitomizes the city as the spectacle’s mainstage<sup>56</sup>, while the ‘beach’ sort of stands for the authentic ‘real thing’ that has to be rediscovered under the spectacle’s alienating superficiality. With its ‘fake’ beach, *The Hum* counters this slogan by sort of reformulating it like that: ‘Beneath the beach, the theatre’ (or: it’s illusion machine) – thereby raising a fundamental doubt regarding the utopia of social authenticity in a shared ‘here and now’. That the view into the sun turns at the same time out to be a view into the past, calls the notion of such a ‘here and now’ even on a more fundamental, phenomenological level into question. Because that it is a view into the past due to the speed of light, implies that this is the case with every view, and that thus everything we see in our ‘now’ is always already a ‘no more’ in its ‘here’, however minimal and imperceptible this temporal gap may be.<sup>57</sup>

But exactly this temporal gap, to which the view into the sun can direct the viewer’s attention, also alludes to an aspect which Debord’s and Susie Wang’s discourses have in common, namely the already mentioned critique of a solipsistic notion of the contemporary. As I argued elsewhere<sup>58</sup>, it is exactly this aspect due to which Debord’s description of the spectacle, separate from his problematic utopia of social authenticity, is still of topicality today. And this is related to the fact that he describes this aspect in his own reflection on the spectacle’s development since 1967, as he formulated it in his *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* from 1988. There, he diagnoses that the spectacle has developed into a new form: “the *integrated spectacle*”<sup>59</sup>. And as one of this new form’s characteristics, he describes “[t]he manufacture of a present [...] which wants to forget the past and no longer seems to believe in a future”<sup>60</sup>. Trine Falch’s description of “the contemporary” as “a demented forever young kind

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> See McDonough, T. (2009): *The Situationists and the City*. London, New York: Verso.

<sup>57</sup> In fact, Lehmann’s conception of presence differs from Fischer-Lichte’s due to his consideration of a very similar aspect: He describes the ‘now’ or “[t]he present” as that which “*is necessarily the erosion and slippage of presence*”, and the latter as a “fading presence – which at the same time enters experience as ‘gone’ (*fort*), as an absence, as an ‘already leaving’” (*Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 144).

<sup>58</sup> See Eiermann: *Postspektakuläres Theater*, p. 17. See also Eiermann: *Der Illusjon er realitet: Susie Wangs teater*, p. 37.

<sup>59</sup> Debord, G. (1990 [1988]): *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. London, New York: Verso, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

of time”, which “promises nothing, remembers nothing”<sup>61</sup>, bears a clear resemblance to this. And the same applies to the above-mentioned program text about *The Hum*, which begins with the sentence: “We are at the outer edge of the present, a demented and forever young state where the past is forgotten and the future is dangerous.”<sup>62</sup>

### **The past and the future**

But of course, *The Hum* does not remain in this state of a demented and forever young time. Like the actors cross the threshold between auditorium and stage, the piece also crosses the outer edge of the present, when the view crosses its horizon into the wideness beyond it. And by this, the past – to refer to it first, before coming to the future – doesn’t remain forgotten at all. Allegorically speaking, the beach becomes a kind of cosmic theatre, in which the spectators’ view reaches extremely deep into the past. In case of the sunlight, admittedly, this is a quite recent past, which isn’t all too deep. But in the immeasurable wideness beyond the piece’s horizon, the sun is only the closest star among myriad other stars, which are far more remote. Of course, these stars are not depicted in *The Hum*. But they are implied by the sun as their allegorical and most prominent representative, so to speak. They are ‘observable’ in an imaginary way. And in this imagination, the further these stars are away from the spectators observing them in that cosmic theatre, the further these spectators look into the past. As regards for example the still relatively close Pleiades, current measurements suggest that their observers see them today as they were in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century – when the dramatic paradigm gathered momentum in European theatre. In contrast, the farthest star discovered up to now, nicknamed ‘Icarus’, is supposed to be nine billions of lightyears away – which means that its observers see it at a time long before the first ancient theatre facility was built, long before humans existed, long before life in general developed on earth, and even long before earth itself and our solar system came into being.

Thus, the view into the ‘immeasurable space’ of the universe, which Susie Wang re-enters as fiction into the ‘small and intimate space’ of a black box, puts the human even more into perspective than the reminiscence of a predramatic theatre. *The Hum* does not only comprise the whole history of (hu)man-made theatre (at least its western history) in an eggshell, so to speak. It also envisions a prehistoric theatre, and even a pre-human one. The view from a beach over the sea might indeed have been one of the first theatrical experiences of humankind. But a beach is also the theatre which sea turtles visit when they lay their eggs – and in which their brood, just like the offspring in *The Hum*, sees the light of the day. Moreover, it is the theatre in which the non-human ancestors of humankind arrived when they managed to leave the sea. And it is also the theatre in which most probably some of the dinosaurs watched the spectacular impact of the meteor which extinguished them. But the view into the universe goes even much further back in time. Like it puts the human being into a prehistoric, primeval perspective that reaches far into the aeon, it also does so with terrestrial life in general, and not least with its environment. It is a view into spaces where no humans or other terrestrials exist,

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<sup>61</sup> Falch: Lecture at Seminar About the Performer.

<sup>62</sup> Susie Wang (2021): Program text about *The Hum*, retrieved on 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 from <https://www.touofficial.com/program/?id=12127>. My translation from Norwegian: “Vi befinner oss i ytterkanten av samtida, en dement og evig ung tilstand der fortida er glemt og framtida er farlig.”

and into times when they didn't exist yet, as well as it is a view into environments where they wouldn't be able to exist, and into times when the development of the environment they are able to exist in still was no more than a distant future.

In fact, this view into a humanless past is at the same time exactly that: a view into the future – a future just as humanless, which in face of our environment's current anthropo(s)genic development appears not all too distant. To put it with the chorus of *The Way Of The Dodo*, a song by English rapper Mike Skinner a.k.a. The Streets: "It's not Earth that's in trouble – It's the people that live on it, no, no – Earth will be here long after – We've all gone the way of the dodo."<sup>63</sup> And to expand this view further into the future with a line from the song *Eine gute Nachricht* by German musician Danger Dan: "The destination of the whole planet is – That it in the end in the sun vanishes."<sup>64</sup> But as the song's title implies, there also is 'a good news': "Not today. There is still time for you and me."<sup>65</sup> And this expresses an attitude which is quite similar to that of Susie Wang, as for example Trine Falch's following description of the neodramatic actor shows:

The neodramatic actor [...] needs to have a well developed live-awareness as well as a death-awareness. Like all live-forms, the neodramatic theatre is mostly about death. I like to believe that we who operate in live situations are better at dying than others. That we're o.k. by the fact that it's over when it's over, and that it was really, and unreally, funny or horrible or whatever, as long as it lasted.<sup>66</sup>

### The theatre and the theory

*The Hum* exemplifies exactly this attitude as well, expressing it literally on the universal level. And the cosmic panorama, which it – as Allegory of the Beach – unfolds in the direction of both past and future, puts not only the human into perspective. It also, by referring to different forms of both human and non-human theatre in this panorama, puts theatre into perspective. Thus, 'The Hum' could, on the one hand, be read as a way to write 'the human' without the 'an' in its end – and taking this 'an' at the same time away from the beginning of the Greek 'anthropos', leaving just the 'thropos' behind – as a 'turn' (*trópos*) away from anthropocentrism (which makes particular sense with the spelling of the term's Norwegian version *antroposentrisme* in mind). On the other hand, 'The Hum' could also be read as a way of writing 'theatre' and 'theory' in one term, with 'hum' standing for both 'atre' and 'ory': 'TheHum' = 'TheAtre'/'TheOry'. Because as the text at hand hopefully shows, *The Hum* invites to the activity of *theaomai*, which in Old Greek means "looking both with the mind's eye and the actual eye", and thus "suggests a close relation between theatre and theory."<sup>67</sup> In fact, the way the panorama of different theatre forms is displayed to the actual eye in *The Hum* affects

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<sup>63</sup> The Streets (2008): *The Way of the Dodo*. Released on *Everything Is Borrowed*. 679 Recordings, Vice Records.

<sup>64</sup> Danger Dan (2021): *Eine gute Nachricht*. Released on *Eine gute Nachricht* (single) and *Das ist alles von der Kunstfreiheit gedeckt* (album). Warner Music. My translation from German (with regard to the rime): "Der ganze Planet ist darauf angelegt – Dass er irgendwann in der Sonne verglüht".

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., my translation from German: "Heute nicht – Es bleibt noch Zeit für dich und mich".

<sup>66</sup> Falch: Lecture at Seminar About the Performer.

<sup>67</sup> Finter, H. & Siegmund, G. (n.d.): Information text about the series 'Theaomai – Studien zu den performativen Künsten', retrieved on 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from <https://www.peterlang.com/series/5829>.

the way of looking at them with ‘the mind’s eye’ as well: It puts theatre into a theoretical perspective.<sup>68</sup> And seen that way, *The Hum* appears not least as an illustration of what Émile Zola meant when he wrote: “Whenever someone wants to shut you into a code by declaring: ‘This is theatre, this is not theatre,’ answer bluntly: ‘The theatre does not exist. There are theatres, and I am searching for mine.’”<sup>69</sup>

Susie Wang’s theatre searches itself by finding all the other theatres in it – theatres of the past and of the future. In the same way as ‘the past finds man and draws her down’, Susie Wang’s theatre finds this past as one among others and thus puts it into perspective. That *The Hum* counters Plato’s philosophy by contrasting his Allegory of the Cave by an Allegory of the Beach, exemplifies this in a very perspicuous way: In Plato’s philosophy, the sun is the epitome of what particularly Jacques Derrida has criticized as logo-, phono- and phallogocentrism.<sup>70</sup> It represents, in other words, the power that shuts (wo)man into the code of patriarchy. The way of facing it in *The Hum*, in contrast, relativizes this power’s past conceptualization by confronting it both with other pasts, and with harbingers of a future that will call it even more radically into question. The female offspring that inflicts the blemish on Barni’s and Sabine’s heteronormative relation – and in the piece’s current version escapes to the sea (or future) – is one of these harbingers. Another one is the moon, to which Kim directs Sabine’s attention when she mesmerizes her in a manipulative way. Because in *Licht und Liebe* – or: in the future of *The Hum* – the moon will return. And then, it will even counter the patriarchal code represented by Plato’s sun very bluntly (to put it like Zola), as it will obscure it in a total solar eclipse.

In a very similar way, Susie Wang’s illusionistic theatre counters the anti-illusionistic code into which the ‘Abramoviés’ of performance art and the ‘Fischer-Lichtes’ of theatre studies try to shut contemporary theatre. And particularly Falch’s way to counter the postdramatic code by ironically declaring a neodramatic one shows, that Susie Wang would most probably also counter the latter as bluntly as the former, if someone tried to shut the group’s theatre into it – maybe even by answering such an attempt by an exclamation as blunt as ‘WHAT THE EGG!?’.

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<sup>68</sup> In relation to this text’s general focus on visibility, it has to be mentioned that *The Hum* also has a not less important acoustic dimension, and that ‘the hum’ usually is the denomination for acoustic phenomena of permanent sounds without obvious causes. The music by Martin Langlie, which continuously plays its own role in *The Hum*, deserves in fact an own article.

<sup>69</sup> Zola, É. (2004 [1895]): *Le naturalisme au théâtre: les theories et les exemples*. Retrieved on 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/13866/13866-h/13866-h.htm>. My translation from French: “Chaque fois qu’on voudra vous enfermer dans un code en déclarant: ‘Ceci est du théâtre, ceci n’est pas du théâtre,’ répondez carrément: ‘Le théâtre n’existe pas, il y a des théâtres, et je cherche le mien.’”

<sup>70</sup> See Derrida, J. (1998 [1972]): Plato’s Pharmacy. In J. Rivkin & M. Ryan (ed.): *Literary theory: an anthology* (pp. 429-450). Malden MA: Blackwell. As regards the term ‘phallogocentrism’, see Derrida, J. (1982 [1972]): *Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. xxv. See also the reference to the former text in relation to Susie Wang’s *Licht und Liebe* in Eiermann: *Der Illusjon er realitet: Susie Wangs teater*, pp. 38-40.

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