

WE INSIST



WE INSIST

... a meeting in Madagascar, a mirror installation at the fence on the border between USA and Mexico, a performance on violence in Damascus, a woven fence of black cables in Marrakech, a performance lecture in the Opera of Gothenburg, secret agents in Damascus, infiltration of a house in Belfort – traces left behind, traces brought with, traces being spread ...

WE INSIST – sound artist Jassem Hindi (Fr) and the dance artists Rani Nair (Se) and Mia Habib (No) – started to work on identity as a crisis, as a tension, and not as a stable concept. The project is about looking at how, through sound and body language, we can question and practice this identity, understood as an unstable nomadic state, crossed over by a multiplicity of tensions and traversed by layers of intensities.

How does identity maintain itself, how does it transmute? How does it sometimes make us slip into madness or void, into frenetic tautological repetition of our self or into an abyss of difference between us and the rest of the world?

Through installations, black boxes, white cubes, public spaces, apartments, texts and photo, the trio works with what is needed and triggered by the different social, cultural and political contexts they find themselves in. And not to mention, what the meetings with different people on the way evokes.

‘We do not work on identity crises in a political language, but in a formal one, to point out structures, to examine what art forms carry those crises, how they are carried into bodies, into music, into art. We use the material those crises have produced, the gestures and the constraints they have generated. Having close contact with the people that invite us, gathering a maximum of information through discussions, pictures, videos and sounds, is an important part of our work. Instead of talking about general politics, we work within the frame and context of our micro political, micro economical situation. We build our space and language with what we can carry with us, and what the situation carries for us.’

September 2009
WE INSIST

VIOLENCE OF DETAILS

Jassem Hindi

It was a work around stillness and tension we called *Details of Violence*. We used contact microphones and long black cables. We worked on fragile positions, both sound and body wise; fragments of postures, deconstructed images and details of violence.

We used the cables, the sounds and contact mikes to build sculptures or clichés which lasted for less than a minute each. We all started in the same position, in a line, and stared at the empty space. Then, within a few seconds, we entered the space, both with sound and bodies, to produce a thirty seconds – one minute living painting.

We sometimes chose not to intervene, not to use the mics, not to use the cables, not to produce any sound. We sometimes stood in position for over two, three minutes, letting the image come to another life, over flown and contaminated by other gestures or sounds. Sometimes we stood still, and provoked a cliché, the projection of a violent moment: torture, trauma, depression, imprisonment, quivering... all kinds of fragility which run under the idea of identity. Sometimes within this violence and tension something broke, a slender movement, a song. Sometimes we bound each other to the cables, sometimes we let it go.

Identity here is deconstructed in multiple layers: violent images coming from the medias, personal crisis, hysteria, loss of a part of our self, of our body, of a territory. Our project is to deconstruct identity as a given image, as a given surface, something that is supposed to stand still forever. This stillness provokes grotesque situations and tension – a tension we want to explore, test, experiment during our performance, together with the public.

Direct and indirect violence offers itself as being ineluctable, and non natural – but nevertheless it is here considered as the frame – the reality principle – the type of process identity has to go through. It is a space in which any kind of initiative, any kind of life has to invade, conquer or get crushed by.

Few months later, as the work went by, and was repeated over and over, in front of a public or in a shut room, I realized how much the title 'details of violence' was not completely adequate. And that it was not at all a study on violence, but a study of details, which had in it a violent side effect.

We were in Belfort, France, at that time, and I realized that most of what obsessed us with this work around cables linked to bodies – producing audible tensions – was not really about producing 'violence'.

As if violence was an essence, or a feeling, which could be unilaterally, universally shared. Violence is not an object. What was actually violent, for us, or for me at least, was the obsession, or the way we pointed at details,

repeatedly. To see what made us move together in the same direction. We were not trying to bathe into violence, but rather to work with details. This is what was so 'violent', or rather, so intense.

This obsession for small folding made by cables on the skin. The drastic change of atmosphere made by minimal position modifications. To be enthusiastic about the curve of a line, a knot on the floor, a faint sound produced by the bodies rubbing the floor. The insistence on a situation. Trying to hold on, again and again. Attempts to



build relation to each other, to the space, to the light, to the sound, to the black cables. Minor details, scarcely present. You could bump into one of our works and destroy it without noticing it. Holding on, and failing. A deserted land of black cables, bodies, sounds. All of this material in an attempt to build a relation; a frail, temporary, minimalistic embryo of identity.

Photo: WE INSIST

WE INSIST

Damascus

*Agency, Agency
Details of Violence*

RELOADING IMAGES DAMASCUS

Reloading Images is an initiative of the Berlin based art association NewYorkRioTokyo. It is an interdisciplinary artistic research platform, initiated by Azin Feizabadi and Kaya Behkalam in 2006.

Reloading Images Damascus invited artists and scholars from Syria and abroad to discuss and explore ways of artistic practice and collaboration, based on an interactive exchange of experiences, ideas, know-how and tools of production and self-organization.

A series of public lectures and workshops invited 98 Weeks & Akram Zaatari (Lebanon), Interruptions Magazine (Jordan), Raqs Media Collective (India), Ubermorgen.com (Austria), Marie Elias & Orwa Nyrabia (Syria), Wu Ming (Italy), and WE INSIST (France/Norway/Sweden).

Reloading Images Damascus did not have one single theme. Instead, it aimed to reflect on the complexity of the circumstances and interrelations in which the project was located: the cultural, social, and economical aspects – as well as the location of the individual – within these structures.

One of the projects during the period was *Secret Agency for Agency towards the Great Transition* where WE INSIST was invited in as secret agents. The photo series by Sanna Miericke in this chapter is a re-enactment of their mission in a public park in the city of Damascus after they had been located in different parts of Damascus on their secret one-man missions.

From Reloading Images web site.

WE INSIST Damascus at Mustafa Ali Gallery. Performance and audience talk. Photo: Azin Feizabadi



NOTES TOWARDS EXHAUSTION*

Roberto Cavallini

* These notes loosely reference Deleuze's essay *The Exhausted*, in Deleuze, G., *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (trans.), London, New York: Verso, 1998. The form is inspired by Maurice Blanchot's fragmentary writings.

There is always an indefinite condition of acceptance that performs invariably and continuously without taking into consideration the place in which I happen to be. I dreamt I could keep going without these walls, this city, your pragmatic decisions. I could not.

This is when exhaustion accomplishes an exhausting gesture of denying not even the possible, but 'possibilization' as such. Gestures in dreams often retrace the possible unexpressed in reality: the seizure of that configuration remains unattainable, scattered. I exhaust nothing, I am exhausted by nothing, I am exhausting not even the possible, just the nothing within it.

So I have been trying to look somewhere, a place in which you don't speak, if there is silence then I don't know, you need to learn also how to be silent. Could you?

'Exhausting any space whatsoever'. Even in the middle of nowhere. Over there. If it is neither passive, nor active, exhaustion is not even in-between the possibility of a being together: the passivity of action. Exhaustion can just be considered something that resides within the tangible appraisal of an essential solitude. No company. No friendship. No love. No sharing of exhaustion.

You spent some time looking over the window, expecting one word, no words, absolute peace notwithstanding. Awaiting to listen to that particular noise, to see that particular movement that leaves you trembling and thinking.

The shape of an evident presence, in its many visible and invisible movements, can be measured and known if it is assumed that any interpretation of its absolute essence will remain impossible to accomplish. Exhaustion attracts nothing, it is attraction blown up into the void.

You said you were exhausted not by waiting, but by the impossibility of grasping and understanding the words written for you by him. Are you still waiting for him?

...

It does matter then if you cannot read.

What occurs as exhaustion is a reversal of the Self from within; in this sense, the 'I' is not exhausted by something or someone. The 'I' is exhausted, by nothing, outside its Self. And it remains suspended over the void, within the Self.

You kept telling him that to be fearless is to avoid any exhaustion. To be afraid is the first step into exhaustion. You said, but you couldn't speak.

Exhaustion exists within a proposition that is invariable to the extent that it is something that is completely generated by the outside. Slowly dragged outside, seated, moving, not moving: staying, leaving, staying.

The traces I left in this place are a minimal activity with no name. As far as the place is concerned, then, the forest is everything. I asked if bearing no name was something dangerous and you said: 'Present memories are gone probabilities'. I already knew that. So I stopped asking.

Exhaustion is the opening and closure of an absence without access; it is a permanent process of burning down the limit of the visible towards its indifferent becoming. It is a combination of words without choice.

'How do you constantly cope with necessity?' you said. 'Which necessity?' I said. With the fact that you cannot be completely self-sufficient, you always are in need of something. And it costs money. What about people? I will never make that mistake again.

Exhaustion and permutation without change: an image appears and then disappears without being noticed, but it is still there, it does not move. To already be exhausting the definition of exhaustion without even beginning to perceive it, without even a stuttered trace of a beginning. Inability of tracing where exhaustion commences and ends.

Is there still something I need to tell you? I am writing to tell you that I am fine. I would like to whisper it slowly, so you can hear the sound of my desire. No pain. Just keep listening to it.

Exhaustion does not have anything to do with renunciation. It is pure expenditure with no ends. Consuming within itself the chance of its end. A demand and, at the same time, the fulfillment of its negation. A suspension allows the activation of a substitution that would establish the informal setting of any operation within the realm of life. Pure life. Exhausted.

Let me come in. Let me go out.

Exhausting the same possibility of exhaustion would be to erase any trace of its movement, with no movement, beyond or *before* exhaustion. And I would bear witness to the silence without words and without voice. Drop by drop, sweating it all out.

Please take care of yourself.

INCONSISTENT PATTERNS, GOD, AND THE CABDRIVER

Mikala Hylding Dal

Bodies in audio-cable-bondage, the disruptive noise of fingertips on electrified audio outlets, frantic movements replaced by frozen ones; not the atonal noise in its own right creates the feeling of uneasiness underlying the piece; rather the pauses in-between sound and movement seem to condense the nature of the raw impressions they are intersecting.

Watching a performance by WE INSIST in an old Arabic domicile in Damascus, my mind strolls to a conversation with a Syrian taxi driver just hours before.

Before there was light there was the lack of sound. Some philosophers ponder if it was this absence that caused God to initiate his six days of world-making; before God created man in his image, man imposed, through the power of mere anticipation, his future shape on the present god.

This means that God was equipped with (although heavenly nevertheless) a body at the topmost extension of which vertical, shell-shaped cavities carved their way inwards, forming with each turn a finer, more delicate spiral to serve as a medium for airborne rhythms.

As God, before he initiated time, found himself in a big hollow, a sound-proof vacuum, surface-less and thus incapable of reflecting the echo of its single inhabitant's movements, the direction of the winding mechanisms impatient to guide the passage of sound through God's ears started turning inwards, it reversed.

He became aware of a deep hissing, gradually increasing its intensity; at its peak: a resonance, high pitched, shooting a straight red line through the pear-shaped meshwork of neural paths contained by the skull. The hissing, he learned, was the sound of his blood circulating through the veins (three days later this vibration inspired him for the tone of the oceans); the high pitch derived from the constant disposition of his nervous system.

I read somewhere that in a sound-proof room, a space without vibration, we are repelled back to our own body, to the tones and vibrations immanent to our anatomy and otherwise silenced, absorbed by the exterior world.

Deprived of objects to swallow the humming escalating outwards from his insides, the volume increased to conquer all space, leaving not even a single fold to escape in. To overcome the acoustic numbness of his surroundings God granted the ideal objects stacked in the back of his mind the quality of extension so that they might let the movements from within his body be over-toned by the movements outside of it (until that moment all objects had been mere loosely connected single coordinates limited to sideways movements).

Through this newly founded interdependency of one body to the other, language emerged, at first in the form of tones, beats, rash movements determined by frequency.

The most persistent inhabitants of God's mind, men, the birth-giving children, were born dancing, swaying from side to side, exalted by the fact that every movement they made would bounce back at them, affirmative of their existence and their power over things. Like children the climax of their play would be the smashing of the toys – with the blow of each fragment a separate cheer. But even more enthralling than the spectacle of one surface violently giving in to another while spreading all over the place, was the moment just before the impact, arms raised high above the head, fingers ready to let go but protracting it, prolonging the moment, re-living it ten times, before it itself has existed even once.

An employee of the Damascene Center for Auditory Research, and a devoted fan of John Cage, explains to me that speech and silence are modulations within the same medium, that of air and pressure, and thus silence is inseparably connected with the anticipation of noise within our auditory frame of reference.

Has the speech been hard, or the sound unpleasant and left undone the interval between its concrete manifestations (its occurrence and its reoccurrence) cannot be described as silence, at least it will not be experienced as such for a living creature (least of all for man blessed and cursed with both memory and imagination – a machine, however, would record nothing but silence or rather would note the air standing still). Although soundless it is not silent because the silence, a category relating to the human perceptory mode, is overruled by an inner echo of preceding and expected sounds/noises/blows. In another analogy the silence between two blows, whether auditory or based on body to body interaction, is turned into violence by the knowledge of the first strike paired with the self-suggestive anticipation of the next.

In this case the 'silence' serves as medium for an endless replication, a multiplied, potentially horribly degenerated echo of its inversion: the most recent sound to have made silence out of a vacuum.

At the WE INSIST show at Mustafa Ali Gallery in Damascus I sat next to a scraggy looking dark-eyed man, the top of his head aligned with my shoulder. As we were discussing the bondage-likeness of the dancers' play with wires connecting skin surfaces to sizzling mixers his associations took us to the topic of Chinese water torture, which he left me with the impression of having experienced intimately; the method does not rely on the discomfort of the actual impact of a water-drop on the forehead of its subject; it is the anticipation of the next drop, the waiting period between release and impact, or rather the uncertainty of their frequency, that will eventually push the victim into insanity: the human mind's obsession with even numbers, with rows and columns, steady, predictable, its desire to establish order, is irreparably shattered by the irritation of an inconsistent pattern.

Between our talks he'd mumble, sometimes frantically, seemingly attempting to keep track of the intervals between noise and its absence, hoping to establish a solid pattern. He left early.



Reloading Images Damascus 2008: Incorporation Agency Agency WE INSIST. Photo: Sanna Miericke

WE INSIST DAMASCUS AS AGENTS FOR 'AGENCY AGENCY' IN 'RELOADING IMAGES DAMASCUS'

Mia Haugland Habib

I am M5, she is R9 and he is J9, the cameraman is C6 with (G) in invisible writing. We are sent on a mission.

He said: *What you perform is you, it is always you.*

She said she feels bad when she is the oppressor, in the short moment she places her foot on the other she's back. He says we are all oppressors, we are all killers. It's just a matter of seeing it. Oh so easy just to be the victim, it is a comfortable place to be. He says to the she and the she, the hidden things that in the moment they give themselves a slight breath of their real face it scares, it's the real truth about the he and the she and the she.

I insisted on being here

I insisted

But sometimes, some tiny moments, like up on the mountain, I faded away, I departed, I flew off the tip of the mountain, over the sea of lights, the green colour of the thousand mosques, up into the skies, I tried to insist, slowly dragging myself back, and there I was, on the top of the mountain again,

Hello, here I am Damascus

I insist Damascus

We insist Damascus

Passport(s), visas, stamps from the wrong country, camouflage, a fast beat, nervous laughter, coded language, hidden messages, web of connections – never looking what they are, labyrinths, narrow streets and hidden corners, many voices, some multiply composed morsing to those that knows, stories, unbelievable stories based on facts hidden in the dust, never on time, never in time, the right place at the right time (if not?...), paranoia, paranoid fiction, a chef talking behind the walls, a snake hidden in beauty and a well shaped tongue, a naive dark voice meeting the double crossers, chai, agents of in-between spaces, all the lonely people where do they all belong, electrical shock, whipping in neon.

AGENCY AGENCY

The End

We focused on four aspects of the mission: induced censorship, immoral persuasion, provoked addiction and offensive degeneration. We targeted hostile intelligence services and double agents. Most of the time we ended up accomplishing disinformation exercises, in other words, nothing.

On the 12th of March, C. and I were supposed to receive information from Z. about an action classified as D. That day, we received a phone call from Z., I guess he was in P**** or J*****. He said *It's quite simple, an informal exercise, they call it 'the end of...'* Maybe the line broke up or meaning failed, a linguistic incomprehension, an apprehensive slip. An interruption turned injunction. *The end of what??!* I asked, I couldn't understand, the line broke up again and Z. was quite clearly screaming something the end of the *****, can you **** me?!

– We lost connection. It's the end of the road, world, word?

– We waited for more information for about two weeks, but nothing came.

– We opted to interpret what Z. had said as 'the end of the word'. We made contact with Office 54f and proceeded.

– What happened afterwards, is (another) hi/story.

Agency

The Agency was an organic body organizing transactions between unknown parties. As a consequence, objectives were unknown; they belonged to that particular effect that is shaped by the frail character of each action undertaken.

One action upon the other, the Agency's expertise was built on practical experience and non-knowledge. Dispersion as mimetic strategy: the agency was an empty vessel, a pliant reservoir. A structure without definition, easily manipulated, without force, from the outside. Its exemplarity was its full commitment to the Great Transition: this commitment was founded on the irreconcilable absence of an unwavering mission. The absent presence of a gift: the Great Transition.

The Agency provides a suitable foundation for direct progression into the definition of the unknown.

First rule: communication is intoxication.

Second rule: readability is exaggeration.

Third rule: love is enough.

Excerpts from the latest Reloading Images publication Damascus: Tourists, Artists, Secret Agents –
<http://kayabehkalam.net/?p=333>



WE INSIST Marrakech. On Marche festival: 'Details of Violence' installation. Photo: WE INSIST and Rim Mejdi

DANSE CONTRE NOURRITURE (DANCE AGAINST FOOD)

WE INSIST

The project, curated by Toufik Iziddiou is based on a simple principle, as stated by its title: 10/20 minutes of performance for a full lunch meal with the hosts, in their apartment.

WE INSIST asked to perform twice in this program. The first time was at a Jewish/Moroccan family. The second at the house of an Iranian movie director and a fashion designer. We tried two different configurations:

In the first one, accounting on the presence of children, we told the story of the origins of WE INSIST, mixed up with Norwegian and Swedish folk songs on tape sung by Mia and Rani. The story was told in French, English and Arabic, and derived on a dance improvisation invading the living room.



The second one was an attempt to redefine the spaces in the house: interior/external, but also limits within the bedroom/living room made with cassette tapes and body movements.

WE INSIST Marrakech. On Marche festival: 'Dance contre nourriture'. Photo: Bouchra Ouizguen and WE INSIST

WE INSIST ON ITS BORDERS – HUNTING ON FOREIGN TERRITORIES: VISUAL INSTALLATION PRACTICE

Jassem Hindi

WE INSIST tries to look at everything as raw material. We are paranoiac readers. We look at a space, an event or a community of people and start reading it. We try to point at the breaking point of a situation. We observe and analyze the disposition of a space, the power relations involved, the way objects, values, ideas or bodies are distributed and exchanged. Observe and analyze a syntax. Actually, what we really do is pacing back and forth. We are dropped into a field, which we start watching with 'WE INSIST' eyes. We roam in a space like hungry dogs. We try to see what is the hidden, what is the obvious. Where does a space starts to bend, where does it shake, what is its own necessary instability. Properties, rules of construction, idiosyncrasy: potential material for our own work process.

WE INSIST is two dancers and a musician. This is our craft, our prime material: sound and body. But the very fact of putting our practices together has side effects: thoughts and questioning about strategies to design, frame, limit, explode and exhaust identities and identification processes. Allow me to say it in another way.

We are not specialists. We ask the stupid questions, put our fingers in the wrong plug, get lost in buildings. Yes, we are two dancers and a musician. This is our 'speciality', this is our personal craft field. But what we actually do, is to try to sit on the breaking point of a situation, in the most uncomfortable position, as long as possible, and see what happens when we insist on it, over and over again. What breaks, what stays, what does it reveal of a structure, of a person, of a place. How can we use the material presented to us, what does it provoke in us as makers. It sometimes has side effects. It makes us realize that our practice, or rather, the simple fact of putting together our common obsessions is stronger than what we can do together as musician, dancer, choreographer, sound artist. The very nature of our practice, of our concerns, makes us go to places where we are not comfortable as makers.

This is what I think happened when we first did an installation in Marrakech, Morocco. In the Cinema School of Marrakech, under the dance festival 'On Marche', we were presented a space to do a performance: the students' private lockers. The disposition of the school has a little Bentham taste to it: the middle level of the building has a corridor which runs all around the school. From the corridor where the private lockers of the students are located, you can see almost all the main public spaces of the building. The pillars running along the wall of lockers is also where the grades of the students in various courses are posted. It is also one of the main passage ways to the studios and classes. It is unavoidable to pass in front of this space at least two or three times a day.

What we tried to do is a very simple act of pointing at this hybrid space, where everything is half seen, half hidden, half public, and half private. We worked on that hybrid exposure.

We used material we had practiced: electric cables. They were familiar material to us, we used them at several occasions, as intermediate material: on the fringe between dance and sound. In previous works, cables were used as contact microphones wires and as objects for the dancer to work with. They were also our first approach to something a little on the fringe of our field of practice: building still images or human sculptures with body and sound. It was then natural for us to use them in order to explore the field of installation. We knew their properties: resistance to tension, presence in a space, how they limit, cut, point and open a space, a body, a movement, a situation.



We tried to experience a technique we did not know: we looked at electrical cables as threads. We used threading as a practice, which had its own side effect. Threading requires patience and coordination. Threading is also a way to observe an object slowly building up from scratch. Threading is a never ending metaphorical material. It is non symbolic, but it is a practice of what a metaphor is. There are several threading strategies: we tried a lot of them. At the same time, all together, one by one, side by side, one after the other. We pointed at a hybrid space and paced back and forth with two kilometres of wires between the pillars which separate the private locker wall and the public space. The result can be seen in the presented pictures.

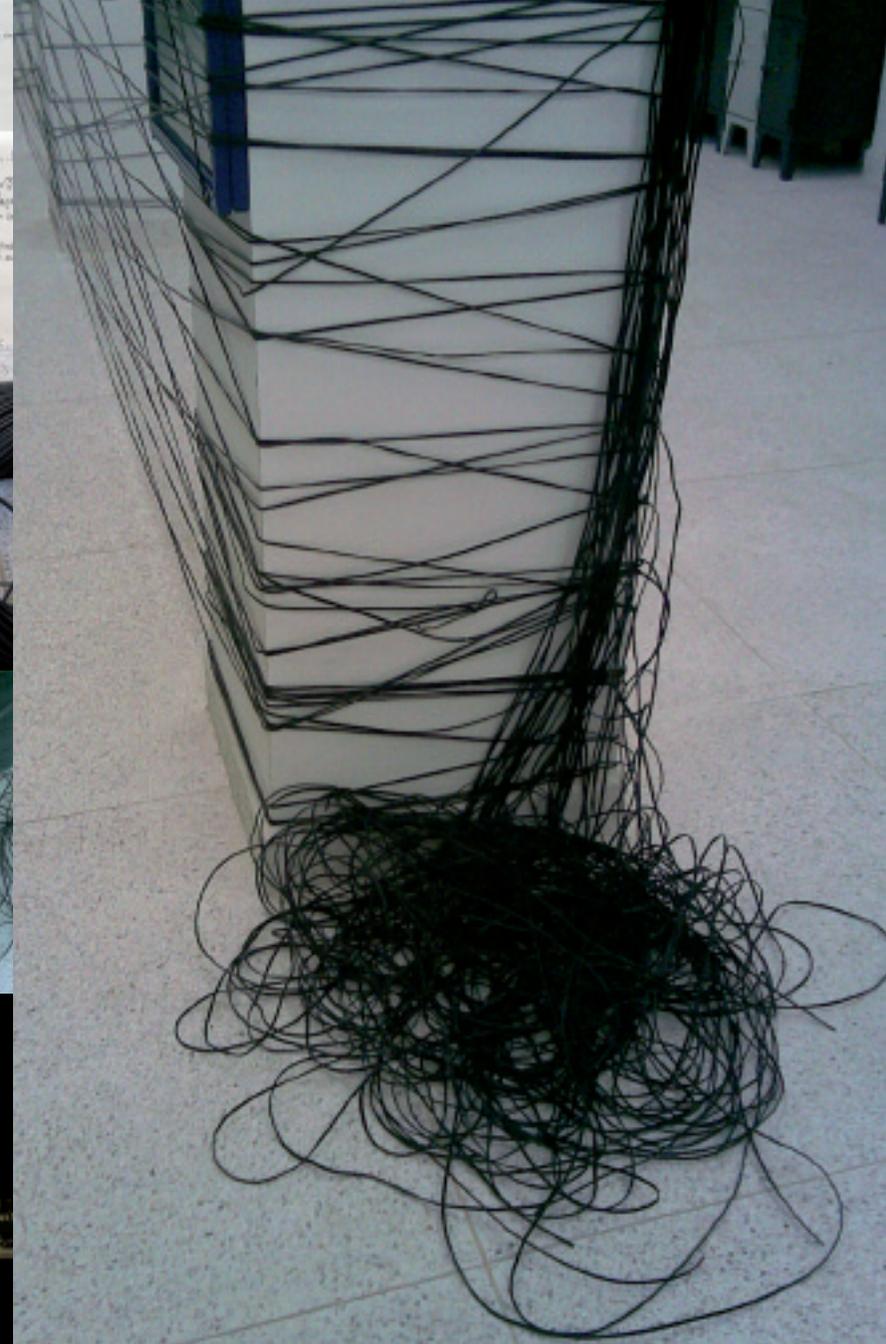


Photo: WE INSIST

WE INSIST

Belfort

Black Box
Danse déplacée





WE INSIST Danse déplacée. Photo: Imre Zsibrik
CCN – Centre Chorégraphique National de Franche-Comté à Belfort

WE INSIST

Mexicali

Running into the Political Equator

RUNNING INTO THE POLITICAL EQUATOR

The 'Political Equator' is a term coined by Teddy Cruz to refer to a phenomenon of an attempt to separate the 'First' and 'Third' worlds by the erection of walls. In this reality the mechanisms of dealing with socioeconomic problems is through a process of avoidance. This process creates a fragmentation of the society on both global and local levels, in which social problematic elements are encapsulated and isolated from the 'healthy'/'functioning' body of society.

The aim of this project is to launch an ongoing process, in which the performing arts community reacts artistically and physically to the reality of the 'Political Equator'.

On the global level, three site specific live performance mini festivals have/will be organized, at three of the most extreme locations where the 'Political Equator' is manifested – the Mexico/USA border (June 2009), the separation wall in Palestine/Israel (Spring 2010) and the border fences between Morocco and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla (Spring 2011)

From Running into the Political Equator web site.

NOTES FROM A 'WE INSIST' PERFORMANCE WITNESS

Gilad Ben Ari

In June 2009 I invited a group of people to run into the political equator, starting with the Mexico/USA border in Mexicali, Baja California. Jassem, Mia and Rani INSISTED on running with us...

Let me start by saying I believe that I know nothing. I believe that there is no constant that contains the idea of 'Truth'. Yet I have a need to react to the overwhelming amount of information that my senses forward to my nerve system, and so I create structures to allow for the processing of information, and for the organization of information in ways that I may later employ it.

- These structures are not arbitrary, but they are, or at least I wish them to be, temporary. I think in this world, if enough belief exists in the 'objective' status of a truth, in the 'for it self' of a structure, than belief alone, can cement it, can fix a thing, in an otherwise floating environment.
- All of this is not written with an attempt to create an agreement. I write it to make clear that I invite any who reads these words to put a question mark after each sentence.
- Our beliefs frame our realities.
- Our beliefs determine our realities.
- Our beliefs frame and determine our realities?

I will follow my own advice and continue by employing a form practiced by a group of friends (Jassem amongst them). I will write the question marks myself. I will let my organizing systems be exposed in the hidden statements I can't help suppress, and that will hide in the frame of questions.

- What allows for lines of division that creates ideas of exterior and interior?
- What allows and to what extent, is there an exclusion of individuals beyond lines of boundaries, that defines who I would consider human?
- What place does the inclusion of an individual as a citizen of a nation state, take in the formation of the identity of the individual?
- What creates a hierarchy of importance where one human's rights gain higher importance than another's? When do I make the difference? When it is a family member? A friend? A member of the same social group? A member of the same profession? A member of the same nation state? A member of the same belief system? A member of the same gender? A member of the same race? A member of the same species? A fellow mammal? A fellow organism? A person who shares my dislike for tomatoes?
- What part does imagination play in the construction of mass societies?
- Will Israel exist in the form of a nation state, if all Israeli citizens stop thinking of themselves as Israelis?
- Do I think how it is to live in other given circumstances, what would I do, how would I deal with overwhelming energy barriers?
- Is a policy that relies on a usage of force to enable it, an indication that there is an injustice being propitiated?
- What is justice?
- What can we learn about a global reality in which many people will agree with the sentiment: 'How lucky I am, that I have been born a Norwegian/Swedish/French, and not a Lebanese/Indian/Palestinian... or heaven forbid an African?'
- What moves people to immigrate?
- What would I do if I were born into the conditions that have driven many others to immigrate?
- In face of a situation I wish to change, where do I place the energy I am able to invest?

- What will change in our perception, if we think of walls as energy barriers? As energy drainers?
- Is usage of violence always a non-constructive consumption of energy?
- What is an act of violence?
- What is a constructive usage of energy?
- What function does energy drainers have in organized society?
- What economic role do energy drainers have? Do they promote further pursue of the production of excess?
- What enables people to disregard inconvenient information?

- Can art act to redefine relations of individuals to information?
- Can an experience redefine a relation of an individual to information?
- What value is there in organizing systems that link information?
- What relation of information can be defined by writing 'Free Palestine' on the Mexico/USA border? On the detention centre for illegal immigrants in Sweden?
- What relation of information can be defined by writing 'Europe, down with your walls in Ceuta and Manila' on the separation wall in Palestine?
- What creates a border, a barrier? An agreement? A belief?
- Is the erection of a border a one-time investment of energy in the construction of a wall? Are border police patrols the manifestation of the constant consumption of energy needed to maintain a barrier?
- Am I phrasing my statements as questions?
- I am phrasing my statements as questions.

- Can a change of form create a change in content?

- What is generosity?
- Can the idea of 'generosity' be key in the observation of the activity of WE INSIST?
- What is responsibility?
- Can the idea of 'responsibility' be key in the thinking of the activity of WE INSIST?
- What is activism?
- Can the idea of 'activism' be key in the perception of the activity of WE INSIST?

- What is it the I INSIST on?
- What is it that WE INSIST on?

WE INSIST *

Julio Torres

The mirror was there, in front of our eyes. At first it looked like a hole, but when we saw what it was reflecting, its content became a reiteration of our reality, the reality in our side. Against the work, we were exposed to witness a wonderful game of perception and with diverse readings. Two dimensions came together at the act of watching. The first dimension was at the stage where the installation was placed: the borderline, the sky, the wires, and the light. The overall picture. The second one consisted in the particular picture held in every one of the more than 30 mirrors that were arranged as a mosaic that was the central part of the piece. The fragmented and the specific reality.

The space repeated itself over and over, like a multiplicity of our image, and every tree, house, wire, and floor, which peacefully adorned the background behind us. For a moment it was possible to imagine that the primordial sense of the piece was no other than to serve as a strange and restless decoration. Nevertheless, the work of dancers Mia Habib, Rani Nair and sound artist Jassem Hindi, proposed precisely something more complex. It insisted that we can never forget about that territory, that we should constantly think about our condition through our limits and borders. It looked as if they were telling us that the wall was nothing but a reminder of our everyday life: The wall is there, and all of us are here, persisting, crossing and contemplating daily, we are being constrained into a territory, an unchangeable political and cultural limitation. Finally, the acknowledgement that the life here is as important meaningful and unique as the lives on the other side.

For each mirror, we are a lot of pieces, because we understand that the reality is not just one only, and sure it is personal and un-transferable, but it can also be shared. Then, what happens here does not just stay here, it crosses the boundaries or we keep it with ourselves when we cross this constant traffic space we call border.

The mirrors were there.

*The photographic testimony that accompanies this text presents WE INSIST a night before the official exhibition and a day after the event *Running into the Political Equator*. It was completely destroyed and just a few pieces of mirrors and wood remain as a testimony.



Photo: WE INSIST, Jorge Colin, Julio Torres

THROUGH THE GUARDIAN'S PATHS

(Documents based on the legend of El Lupón)

El Lupón is everywhere. El Lupón is not anywhere. El Lupón is in the heart of our city. El Lupón is fiction and at the same time is more real than reality. El Lupón is a merciful truth in the voices and the imaginary visions of the *Mexicalenses*, the run and tell that people built with the personage, with the idea, with the legend of a character that was dedicated to help *la raza*. El Lupón is an amusing altar facing the border fence at Colón Avenue, and in the surrounding places is a small figure or statue that circulates between their faithful; a pray, a song, a dance, a collection of oral stories in the collective conscience of our city. El Lupón is the migrants' saint. El Lupón crosses borders and at the same time is a faithful representation of solidarity between people. In his eyes and posture we found the mission of a very human, human being. As everybody from this sanded land, Lupón's sight is always on the horizon, firm in his intention, firm in his parsimony, firm in his silences. El Lupón is an artistic project and a cultural anthropological rescue project. Once, he held me and told me not to worry, that everything was going to be fine. El Lupón is the visual prayer of the unnamed, the anonymous, and the voiceless people. We can imagine thousands of Lupónes, tracing the Californian territory in the search of a hero. El Lupón is an artifact of the *Mexicalenses* poetical myth, rescued lovingly by Ismael Castro, a multiple-discipline artist that found in the personage a sense and a need: the need of people to comfort themselves with altruists figures and the every day heroes. El Lupón is the critical mirror of all saints, which gives the character a higher status than every other urban-rural myth: he is a saint trying to exist despite many denies his existence. This makes him a higher audacity of our culture: El Lupón concedes the miracles made and come true in your imagination.



*Translated from the original text of Alejandro Espinoza
by Alejandra González Machado*

WE INSIST met El Lupón in Mexicali.
Photo: WE INSIST

What do you insist for?

WHAT DO YOU INSIST FOR?

Boyan Manchev

We insist is not only a formula: this is a crucial point to make. Yes, we are all tired of the easy today 'post-modern' rhetoric of fluidity; we are tired of any sort of negative dialectics, which glorifies the weakness, the softness and the flexibility and are suspicious to the affirmative power, which has been demonizing the concept of force over the last few decades. Perhaps WE INSIST project is at first place a reaction to that global tendency of *desistence*: insistence *contra* desistence. At the same time, the title of your project could also be understood as a reaction to the over-exploitation of the category of *resistance* as a tool of self-legitimization in contemporary art, which risks reducing the idea of resistance to an empty performative formula.

Let's insist then, let's affirm, let's go further, let's invent. Let's turn our back to the ongoing generalized scepticism and resignation. Let's be together on that way. However, there are some questions, and perhaps not easy ones, to ask:

How to resist? How to insist? And what do you insist for?

The formula *We insist* is indeed a performative utterance, or a gesture: it is what the linguist John L. Austin has described as 'doing things with words' half a century ago. Therefore my next question is: What would you like *to do*? In other words, what, apart from the name, *WE INSIST* insists for? I believe that you don't insist for the insistence's sake. Your project is for sure not intended to be that of a *pure insistence*, an answer to the *pure art* of the end of the 19th c. Yet, we have to be aware that in a performative context every artistic act is an act of insistence and that, consequently, there is always a risk of reducing the performative gesture to a normalized statement.

We need then some terminological and conceptual precautions. First of all, let's be attentive to the semantic potential and the force of the concepts, these cores of complex and often polemic intensities. What does it mean *to in-sist*? The Latin-Greek etymology of the word *in-sist* comes from the Latin verb *sistere* [come to stand], corresponding to the Greek *histemi*, from which derives also the Greek word for revolt, *stasis*. The verbs *histemi* and *sistere* are crucial semantic cores in both Greek and Latin, from which derive a series of fundamental concepts, from *insistence* and *consistence* to *resistance* and *existence*.

Do you relate – and how – in-sist to con-sist? What about to re-sist? Or to per-sist? To ex-ist?

I find it really promising to relate the concept of *insistence* not only to that of *resistance* but also to that of *persistence*. I believe that the question of *persistence* is the crucial question today. In what sense?

The question of persistence *matters* in a world of a globalised liquidity, of a bio-capitalised transformability, the world of the bio-capitalist appropriation and production of the forms of life. In other words, in a world where everything is supposed to change and to insist for the change we have to ask the question of what remains unchanged. It *matters* to critically ask the question in order to re-affirm something, and the thing to reaffirm can't be anything else but the thing, which does not change and which could not be consumed as change. And what could not be consumed as change is nothing but change itself.

In that perspective, contemporary art could be seen then as an *exemplum* of what I call *perverse* transformation.* The mainstream of contemporary art today could very well correspond to the ideal of 'creative capitalism', exalting mobility, fluidity, open connections, networks, etc. It appears as an exemplary field for the absorption and the appropriation of the modes of subjectivation by the hegemonic regimes of production and consumption. For that reason contemporary art and dance in particular appears also as a field of an exemplary struggle.

Therefore, the decisive question concerning the praxis of contemporary dance today is: How to *persist* in the permanent movement – how to persist in the current of bio-political aesthetic fluidity and absorption of life – without abolishing the possibility of the event of freedom?

This question is the question of a radical materialism to come: the question of *matter* as the place for change to happen without being reduced. Radical materialism implies a *resistance* to any kind of transcendent normative plane: technique, aesthetics, aesthetical technique or technical aesthetics, any codification of movement but also modes of institutional production. It also demands *insistence* or affirmation. At the moment when the forces of the global capitalism are absorbing each day further the potential for transformation in order to submit it to the imperatives of the (economic) growth, which resulted in the alteration of 'our' world, we have the task to affirm the persistence of forms of life through trans-formation. The persistence in the movement, the persistence as movement, is our task: artistic, philosophical, political.

Let's insist then: let's move ahead while persisting in the movement.

*See for instance *Transformance: The Body of Event in It Takes Place When It Doesn't: On Dance and Performance Since 1989*, ed. Martina Hochmuth, Krassimira Kruschkova, and Georg Schollhammer (Frankfurt: Revolver Verlag, 2006).

CONTRIBUTORS

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Ismael Castro, visual artist from and currently working in Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico. WE INSIST first encounter: Running into the Political Equator and PRISMA forum, Mexico June 2009.

Julio Torres, visual artist from and currently living in Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico. WE INSIST first encounter: Running into the Political Equator, Mexico June 2009.

Jorge Colin, photographer from and currently living in Mexico City, Mexico. WE INSIST first encounter: Running into the Political Equator and PRISMA forum, Mexico June 2009.

WE INSIST

Mia Haugland Habib – Dance artist

Studied Choreography and Dance Pedagogy at Oslo National Academy of the Arts.

Identity, religious and cultural convergence, the individual in relation to oppressive structures and regimes are recurring themes in Mia's work. She sees her journeys as an integral part of her work and has very frequently visited areas of conflict as part of the research to upcoming productions. Mia's work, both as a dancer and a choreographer has brought her to extremely different contexts in Europe, Madagascar, Israel, Mexico, Iraq, Turkey, Morocco and Syria to mention some.

Among others she currently works with Julie Nioche/A.I.M.E. in the piece *Matter* (F), the performance group L.U.N (N), Sweet & Tender Collaborations and lately for Tommy Noonan/PVC company Stadttheater Freiburg in *Tout Court* (G).

Spring 2009 Mia premiered the duet, *a couple dance*, with Guilherme Garrido (P) co-produced by Dance House in Oslo. She was also facilitating and navigating the Sweet & Tender project *Living house* at Dance House in April 2009 and is a collaborator of the the artist driven world wide project Sweet & Tender Collaborations.

Mia is currently on the board of The Norwegian Opera and Ballet.

Rani Nair – Dance artist

Studied at the London Studio Center. History of art and dance in Lund, Sweden. Also studied traditional Indian dance (Bharathnatyam) and Indian martial arts (Kalarippayat).

Works as a choreographer and a dancer, while doing research in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Austria, Madagascar, India, Mongolia, France, Estonia, Mexico and Syria.

In 2006 she was the first Swedish dancer to be invited by the CND of Paris to perform her own work. Her work focuses around the ideas of post colonial conflicts and social bindings.

She has collaborated with among others Julie Nioche/A.I.M.E. (F), Shobana Jeyasingh (UK), Roger Sinha (C), Attakalari (I), Annika B Lewis/Kassandra production (D).

Founding member of Rörelsen, a co-operative of choreographers in south of Sweden. Collaborator of the the artist driven world wide project Sweet & Tender Collaborations.

Jassem Hindi – Sound artist

Studied philosophy at the Sorbonne, Paris (Master: Approach to the reading of Hegel in French philosophy – Bataille, Kojève, Derrida, Lebrun).

Works with raw sound material, in situ. Diverted machines, (walkmans, turntables, K7 players), matters (plexiglas, metal scraps, industrial leftovers), objects, lost tapes, no input mixing board, contact microphones – often based on Lo-Fi settings. Sound is treated as a plastic material. He experiments with matters capable of being transformed into a performance, a concert, a visual installation.

Collaborates with artists often associated to the international experimental scene (musicians, visual artists, performers, choreographers). He has performed with musicians and performers in Lebanon, Syria, France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Greece, Mexico, and Madagascar.

Collaborator of the the artist driven world wide project Sweet & Tender Collaborations.

WE INSIST work-in-progress 2008/2009:

SKITte/Sweet & Tender Collaborations, Porto, Portugal, August 2008. www.sweetandtender.org
Göteborg Dans & Teater festival, Sweden, August 2008. www.festival.goteborg.se
Reloading Images, Damascus, October 2008. www.reloadingimages.org
On Marche Festival, Marrakech, Morocco, January 2009. www.dansemarrakech.com
Théâtre de la Cité Internationale, Sweet & Tender Collaborations, Fragments d'expériences, Paris, April 2009. www.theatredecalicite.com
CCN – Centre Chorégraphique National de Franche-Comté à Belfort, France, June 2009. www.ccnfc-belfort.org
Running into the Political Equator. <http://runningintoequators.wordpress.com>
PRISMA forum, Mexico, July 2009. www.prisma-forum.info

WE INSIST performances:

Premiere at Dansens Hus, Oslo, Norway, 5.–8. November 2009. www.dansenshus.com
On Marche Festival, Marrakech, Morocco, January 2010. www.dansemarrakech.com
... performance schedule to be continued ...

With and by: Mia Habib, Rani Nair, Jassem Hindi
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Production: WE INSIST and Mia Habib Productions/Sweet & Tender Norway
Executive producer: Cecilie Lindeman Steen
Production assistance: Martin Døving
Communication management: Ida Gudbrandsen and Ingrid Moberg

Co production:

Dansens Hus, Norway, Göteborg Dans & Teater festival, Sweden, CCN de Franche Comté à Belfort dans le cadre de l'accueil/studio – Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication – DRAC Franche Comté et de la convention culturesfrance/Conseil Régional de Franche Comté, France, Riksteatern, Sweden

We wish to thank

all co producers, contributors, funders, Reloading Images, Sweet & Tender Collaborations, 555 Porto, Rørelsen–choreographers in Skåne and everyone supporting WE INSIST and WE INSIST Nord in the process – and last but not least, we wish to deeply thank Cecilie L. Steen, our creative producer and main support.

<http://weinsist.blogspot.com>
http://www.myspace.com/rani_nair
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<http://www.myspace.com/zerokelvinzero>



WE INSIST Nord 2009/2010

Du store verden!/DSV is proud – as a co-producer – to contribute to the realization of WE INSIST in the Nordic region. After the traces and experiences through the realization of the initial WE INSIST project, WE INSIST Nord will explore the possibilities created in meetings within a limited region: the Norwegian, the Nordic – cultures in the periphery of the globe; with scarce population over large areas – cultures that every day, due to the increased diversity of the population, debate the constantly changing individual-, group- and national identity.

WE INSIST Nord will contribute to the evolution of performing arts in the Nordic region, to the debate of our identity and to the curiosity in human and artistic meetings in our scarcely populated regions of the North.

Du store verden!/DSV is a producer of artistic events and a co-operative network of organisers, NGOs, artist groups and resource persons – which aims to promote and enhance intercultural artistic and cultural cooperation on a national and international level. The activities include artistic projects within all art disciplines, distribution of artists, communication, competence building, lobbying and networking

WE INSIST Nord 2009/2010:

Polar Spectacle, Vadsø, Norway, 28 September–1 October 2009. www.polarspectacle.no
Moderna Dansteatern C/O Hammarby Art Port, Stockholm, Sweden, 11, 12, 14 November 2009. www.modernadansteatern.se
Nordlysfestivalen, Tromsø, Norway, 30 January–2 February 2010. www.nordlysfestivalen.no
... tour schedule to be continued ...

Production: WE INSIST and Mia Habib Productions/Sweet & Tender Norway and Du store verden!/DSV
Co production: Polar Spectacle, Vadsø, Moderna Dansteatern, Stockholm, Nordlysfestivalen, Tromsø



WE INSIST 2008/2009 – WE INSIST Nord 2009/2010

Publishers:

Du store verden! – the DSV network

Kongensgate 2, 0153 Oslo, Norway

post@du store verden.no – www.du store verden.no

and

WE INSIST and Mia Habib Productions/Sweet & Tender Norway

Schlepppegrellsgt. 13, 0556 Oslo, Norway

<http://weinsist.blogspot.com>

Edition: 2000

ISBN 978 82 997205 4 0

WE INSIST and Mia Habib Productions/Sweet and Tender Norway and Du store verden!–the DSV network
2009

Chief editors: WE INSIST – Mia Habib, Rani Nair, Jassem Hindi

Editors: WE INSIST and Mia Habib Productions/Sweet & Tender Norway and Du store verden!–the DSV network

Front cover photo: Christine Sehnoui

Design: Ane Valderhaug

Paper: 150 gr Scandia 2000

Printers: RK Grafisk as

WE INSIST and Mia Habib Productions/Sweet & Tender Norway

www.du-store-verden.no

WE INSIST and Mia Habib Productions/Sweet & Tender Norway
Du store verden!-the DSV network
2009