



SPAFRICA

Premiere: May 11th 2023 at Theatre Vidy-Lausanne

Produced by: Studio Julian Hetzel

Co-produced by: CAMPO Gent (BE), Theatre Vidy-Lausanne (CH), Schauspiel Leipzig (DE),
SPRING Performing Arts Festival Utrecht (NL), Auawirleben Bern (CH)

Supported by: Performing Arts Fund NL, City of Utrecht (NL), Vriendenloterij Fund (NL), Onassis
AiR Athens (GR)

A project by Studio Julian Hetzel in collaboration with Ntando Cele. A solo performance for black box theatres (min. 10x10 metre). The piece combines elements of theatre, music (spoken word) and video.

SPAfrica is a performance about empathy and extractivism that explores how closely racism is linked to capitalism through water as conflict material.

This performance is developed through a dialogue of two artists that both work creatively with dirty politics and dark humour. Building on Hetzel's experience as a theatre director, musician

and visual artist, *SPAfrica* will be constructed around musical structures and visual arts installations on stage that are brought to life during the performance. Together with the South African/Swiss performance maker and performer Ntando Cele (who often combines elements of stand up comedy and music) they will create a hybrid experience that moves back and forth between lecture performance, concert, music video and theatre. The Utrecht-based musician and producer Frank Wienk (Binkbeats) will co-create the compositions and the sound design for the piece that are inspired by lament songs, natural metronomes and electronic beats.



Background

In their new creation Studio Julian Hetzel explores the limits of empathy – the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within their frame of reference. In *SPAfrica* the discourse on empathy is taken a step further with the goal to reveal problematic mechanics of its working. What if empathy is a practice and an active technology that is not to modify and to work against privilege and power but a tool that reinforces it?

I am water, you are water, we are all water... (Yoko Ono)

In their new project, Studio Julian Hetzel introduces a sustainable product that is as conflicting as it is clear: bottled drinking water that originates from the sub-Saharan regions and is

imported into Europe. *SPAfrica* - the world's first 'empathy drink'. An invitation to critically reflect about extractivism and commodity-fetishism.

The ludicrous story of this water challenges the relationship between consumers and products by leveraging global inequality. Every metre of the 9.000 km journey through the Sahara and the Mediterranean towards Europe adds to the value of this ambiguous liquid. As a paradox, the unrestricted movement of goods highlights the struggle of the people who live in the countries where it is sourced. *SPAfrica* brings awareness to the interconnection between consumerism and racism on the example of a material that is considered a human right.

In his writings on the idea of a borderless world, Achille Mbembe identifies three freedoms in liberal thinking: freedom of movement, freedom of capital and freedom of services. But where are the people? It seems like people on the move are seen as a threat to order. That's why Mbembe proposes a fourth freedom, that has specifically to do with freedom of movement of persons. If sovereignty means to capture people, a central goal of the state is to limit and to control the movement of its citizens. In that sense, the paradox of a liberal vision of freedom is the promotion of freedom on the one hand and the suppression of people's movement on the other.

SPAfrica unravels how water bodies and bodies of water are related and we link the extraction of natural resources with a more poetic idea of extractivism by working with tears as an alternative raw material.

Make me cry

For *SPAfrica*, the extraction of natural resources is challenged by an ambiguous and poetic proposition. The water is offered to a group of professional mourners with the aim to harvest their tears. Professional mourners shed their tears in exchange for payment. For *SPAfrica* the tears are farmed at the borders of Europe, (the South of Greece and Italy, where every day large numbers of refugees arrive from the African continent). In these tear-farms grief is performed for the loss and the suffering to do with migration.

The tears are both an actual and a metaphorical resource and that's how the liquid is not only to hydrate but also to manage pain and to heal figuratively. The shift from conventional natural resources to these rather unconventional "human resources" bring a dimension that connects to our emotions directly. The tear farms are documented by video that is shared during the performance.

The labour of mourning (for grief and loss) has been a tradition for centuries in many cultures, it is a work that blurs the lines between the real and the fictional, between authenticity and a staged performance.

“...Professional mourners describe their role as both spectator and subject. In occupying both roles, they maintain enormous agency in this space. As a result, governments and organised religion have often marginalised their practices because they threaten their authority. Populations and individuals are organised in loss through religion and governance.” Bhabha Homi (in conversation with Simon Taryn)

By using tears as a resource to promote empathy, *SPAfrica* proposes to use alternative resources and currencies. Can we trade trauma for empathy? Guilt for hope? Fear for pain?



On the exploitation of trauma and the mining of identities

In *SPAfrica* the artistic proposition goes beyond the commodification of concrete materials to the possibility of capitalising on intangible assets such as identity and cultural background. In the international art market, cultural background and identity of the protagonists have become valuable assets of value creation. It seems like trauma is the new gold of the arts. In *SPAfrica*, South African/Swiss performer Ntando Cele and German/Dutch theatre maker Julian Hetzel explore the possible exploitation of their own trauma by tracing back steps of valorization. What does it take to transform a negative resource into something valuable?

Ntando Cele's work questions the concept of identity, investigates social prejudices and dismantles cultural stereotypes over the past ten years she has dedicated her artistic practice to these questions. *'Knowing a society is multicultural doesn't necessarily mean that there is intercultural understanding.'* She addresses the racism hidden in everyday life with politically incorrect statements and jokes. Gleefully she challenges the audience to face their perceptions.

In *SPAfrica* Cele and Hetzel analyse with a critical eye the exploitation and marketing of identities and the narratives attributed to them within the cultural sector. How come certain themes and narratives are assigned and attributed to certain people? Who sets these rules and who profits from these mechanisms?

In today's cultural capitalism, extractivism is also at stake. As John Jordan writes in *Cultures of Rebellion*: "...the art world shows vampire-like tendencies, sucking value out of whatever is a fashionable topic, and regurgitating it into detached objects, performances or experience."

In their artistic research the inherent power dynamics of their own work relation is a point of departure for Cele and Hetzel to reflect on alchemy. Both are implicated in the situation and in the art market here, both artists contribute to the system that they criticise. Together, they depart on a journey through a minefield where identity and racial taboos are dismantled and new questions are raised. *SPAfrica* is a journey for all those who thirst for knowledge about the flow of water, tears and money in the arts. Cheers!





Credits:

Concept: Julian Hetzel and Ntando Cele

Direction: Julian Hetzel

Performance: Ntando Cele

Dramaturgy: Miguel Angel Melgares

Artistic advisor: Sodja Lotker, Khanyisile Mbongwa

Music & composition: Frank Wienk

Light design: Nico de Rooij

Technical coordination: Vincent Beune, Aengus Havinga

Technicians: Tom Doeven, Simon Kelaita, Bea Verbeek, Wout Jansen

Technical solutions: Merijn Versnel, Guido Bevers

Production coordinator: Marieke van den Bosch

Production Cape Town: Lungile Mbongwa

Galerist Cape Town: Mpilo Ngcukana

Production assistant: Jana Riese

Assistant costume designer: Merel van Erpers Roijaards

Mask artist: Carly Heathcote

Make-up artist: Julia Markow

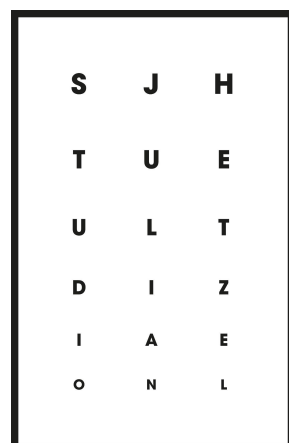
Prop maker: Saskia Hartog

Video Documentation: Reynold Reynolds, Bongeka Ngcobo

Photography: Alexandra Masmanidi, Anouk Maupu

Tour:

11–13 May 2023	Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne (CH) (Premiere)
15–16 May 2023	Auawirleben, Bern (CH)
19 May 2023	Figurenfestival Erlangen (DE)
21–23 May 2023	SPRING Festival Utrecht (NL) (Dutch premiere)
8–11 June 2023	Schauspiel Leipzig (DE)
16–22 June 2023	Latitudes Contemporaines Festival, Lille (FR)
8–9 July 2023	Santarcangelo Festival (IT)
11 July 2023	Kilowatt Festival, Sansepolcro (IT)
11–13 August 2023	Boulevard Theater Festival, Den Bosch (NL)
23, 24, 28 September 2023	BoCA Biennale, Lisbon and Faro (PT)
13–14 October 2023	Actoral Marseille (FR)
24 October 2023	Chassé Theater, Breda (NL)
16–18 November 2024	Frascati, Amsterdam (NL)
22–24 November 2023	CAMPO, Gent (BE)
6 December 2023	Theater Rotterdam (NL)
8 December 2023	De Schuur, Haarlem (NL)
9 December 2023	Corrosia, Almere (NL)
24 January 2024	Theater De Nieuwe Vorst, Tilburg (NL)
14 Februari 2023	Grand Theatre Groningen (NL)
16 February 2024	Het Nationale Theater, The Hague (NL)
12 March 2024	Points Communs, Cergy-Pontoise (FR)
26–28 April 2024	Donau Festival, Krems (AT)
28 May 2024	KunstFestspiele Herrenhausen, Hannover (DE)
12–13 June 2024	Festival Freiburg (DE)



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