Antonia Blocker: What is the terrace of lungs?

Fani Parali: I have written about a 'valley of lungs' before: a vast place where singing voices are the core inhabitants. Due to the proximity and intimacy of the Invites gallery's space and scale, I wanted to make it into a part of that valley, a smaller and condensed part of that land. In geological terms, terraces are land remnants of sorts. They are created by former floodplains of rivers or streams; formations caused by erosions or oceans cutting into land; through changes of the sea level; movement of tectonic plates; or changes of the climate... Strange edges and centres at the same time, both shifting and solid. Bring the lungs and the voices in, I thought.

AB: The finished performance is the result of a number of different stages; can you speak about the specificity of your working process?

FP: It's true; the final result of the performance comes by piecing together a puzzle of many different processes and bringing them to a stage where they are no longer pieces, but a world. Using a set of my own criteria, this world appears and somehow makes sense.

The processes I use support one another and lead each other to something I hope is new and undefined. First, I write the text that holds who my characters are, and what they communicate to the rest of us. These words are then transformed into songs, which I devise and record with two different people who give me their voices. The emphasis at this stage is to pour soul into the words, and to reach new territories where the voice transcends its human nature and becomes 'other'. For example, wilder like an animal, or more solid like a building. Then this recorded audio is knitted together tightly, and given to two other people, who are performers and drag artists. They have to learn it very well, make it their own, so they can

lip-synch it accurately for the performance. Rehearsals are required, where, by working with the performers, we bring the audio to life. At this point they transform into what I like to call 'the creatures'.

Meanwhile, during all these stages, I am also making the sculptural parts of the work, both costumes and structures that can exist in an exhibition, and also play a role in the performance, as parts of the characters' identities and bodies. In making these, I use several techniques, such as welding, life-casting, working in clay and mould-making.

AB: Lip-syncing is often thought of as revealing a lack of talent, or as comical or camp – can you talk about its nuance and importance in relation to your work?

FP: Lip-synching to recorded voices is one of the principal elements in my performances. I have been inspired and fed with curiosity by the process, especially when I've seen it used in drag culture.

In my performances, lip-synching takes a different role; I write for the pre-recorded voices, drawing on a fountain of ideas and influences that I gather from various places, both imaginary and real. For me, lip-synching becomes the channel through which these voices can be heard, in an uncanny and potent way. Although it can be a very obvious illusion (or sometimes not!), it does temporarily create a portal, a threshold, through which the characters, the disembodied voices, connect to and communicate with the audience. And through this threshold they transmit and receive at the same time. It is in this eerie paradox that I think an absence becomes a presence. The audience sees the performers and hears the voices through speakers in the gallery space, disconnected from their origin; they can be heard again and again, with every nuance and breath that imbues them, forever carefully threaded together.

I have experienced loss in my life from an early age, and I have had to build bridges where I can still somehow communicate with people who are not physically here anymore. I believe that after someone ceases to live, they still have a voice. Maybe by creating channels and vessels for these spectral voices, I allow them to come back, and to be heard. Something new is created through this process; it takes on fresh forms and it is moulded in a unique way, which I find moving. My creatures are often angels, or spirits, and they can travel between worlds.

AB: You've talked about the power of the use of the voice and specifically the recorded and narrated voice. What do you think the disconnect between the voice and the physical performer allows or creates?

FP: The concept and, even more so, the perception of absence are quite crucial for me, in both a literal and an almost spiritual way. I have found that through the recorded and narrated voice, I can make certain powerful things happen. Since the voices are being *mediated through* rather than *produced from* the performers' bodies, they start their journey as disembodied. The physical bodies are important vessels, carrying what needs to be said. The characters become subjects; at that moment they are endowed with a soul, as an entity. Simultaneously, the viewers have a relationship to this experience, and are invited to observe and feel these characters come to life, to exist.

The physical reality of the characters in their world is constantly moving, but the sounds and the singing are fixed. As such, they don't only belong to this immediate present but rather, they manifest again and again. The recorded voice exists without a body and therefore can carry an arresting echo. In a similar way to moving image, the recorded voice is associated with its

original source and at the same time excluded from it; taken away from there to here, from past to present and into every future replay. So I think that this disconnect between the voice and the performers' physical bodies allows the work to unseal dimensions that transcend, that go beyond what we fail to see or hear on the periphery – the outermost level of awareness – to go deeper and further.

AB: How does the idea of choreography manifest in your work – both in the literal, physical sense, and in the more abstract sense of choreographing different mediums?

FP: For me, I think choreography is the moment when everything comes together the way it should. It's when all the elements find their place and the right way to be with each other, and actually, I find it quite instinctively. If I am careful, sensitive, and open enough during the whole creative process, when the moment comes to bring things together in the rehearsals, I *know* what is right and what is not; I can feel it.

AB: Can you talk about the significance of the sculptural objects, props and staging?

FP: The sculptural objects, the staging and the costume parts are all important in that they make the world of the creatures real and particular. These elements all have to be relatable and carry human qualities that we can all identify with and feel for; but they also have to be 'other', and they need a valid context to come into being. I have found that by making the performers wear or be inside costumes or structures that constrict their movements, they can exist as the characters; it gives them an absurd realness. They don't pretend to be something strange and other: they *are* other and they can only be *that* way, otherwise their wings will break, or their limbs will crumble. And in all the specificity and idiosyncrasy of these costumes and sculptural settings, I can enjoy manifesting

my imagination, while giving the creatures character and purpose.

AB: How complete are the characters in your mind? Do they only exist for the moment of the performance, or are they fully realised for you?

FP: I read something that the author Elaine Scarry wrote and it really stayed with me; she was commenting on the way readers visualise in their mind what they are reading about: 'it is not hard to imagine a ghost successfully; what is hard is successfully to imagine an object, any object, that does *not* look like a ghost'. In a way, that is how the characters come to me at first, like fragile spectres. Then step-by-step, I make them come to life, and I think it's when I give them words that they become more real. And when the words turn into voices, they then have a presence, and when the voices find the bodies and the shelter (of the gallery space) to exist in, they can be fully realised. But I have faith in them from that first moment, even if their outlines are not yet defined; I know they are there.

Credits
Performers: Maxi More and Rachel Porter
Voices: Amina Abbas-Nazari and Elliot Lewis

Reverse: Fani Parali, *The Terrace of Lungs*, 2019. Courtesy of the artist

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ZABLUDOWICZ COLLECTION

Invites
FANI PARALI
THE TERRACE OF LUNGS

Thursday 2nd May, 7–9pm
Performances every half hour

Saturday 4th May, 2–5pm
Saturday 11th May, 2–5pm
Sunday 12th May, 2–5pm
Thursday 16th May, 6–9pm
Saturday 18th May, 2–5pm
Sunday 19th May, 2–5pm
Performances every hour

Fani Parali (b. Greece, lives in London) studied BA Sculpture at Camberwell College of Arts and completed her postgraduate studies at the Royal Academy Schools in 2017. Selected solo and group exhibitions include: Drawing Biennale 2019, Drawing Room, London; *Hyper Mesh*, Assembly Point, London, 2019; *Arc*, Herrick Gallery, London, 2018; *The Creatures*, Chalton Gallery, London, 2018; *Chumming*, The Pipe Factory (part of GI Festival), Glasgow, 2018; *Bearing Liability*, Strange Cargo Gallery, Folkestone, 2017; RA Schools Show 2017, Royal Academy Schools, London; *Gender, Identity and Material*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2017; *MONO7*, Courtyard Theatre, London, 2017; *Oral Rinse 2*, Waterloo Action Centre, London, 2016; *Dark Water*, Dilston Grove, London, 2016; *A COOL DRINK TO CHEEK*, Plazaplaza, London, 2014. Parali was one of the recipients of the Studiomakers Prize, by Outset and Tiffany and Co., 2017.

Zabludowicz Collection Invites is dedicated to solo presentations by UK-based artists without UK commercial gallery representation.

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