

**I WORK,  
THEREFORE  
I  
AM**

**IK  
WERK  
DUS  
IK  
BESTA**

**ANAT STAINBERG**

**ANAT STAINBERG  
PERFORMANCE ARTIST, POET**

The Israeli Anat Stainberg has a liking for aesthetic interventions related to dance. Her happenings do not entirely revolve around beauty, however. She also examines the position of women in society and is sooner apt to respond to current issues such as war and identity.

Not so strange, then, that she should be interested in a temporary stay in the Zuidas. She likes variety and welcomed the idea of being challenged by what for her is an unusual way of working. "Normally I come up with an idea first," says Stainberg in reference to her area of research, "and I seek specific handholds in order to carry out my idea. This time I was curious about the extremely general theme."

Considering her feminist approach, the first thing that fascinated her about the Zuidas was obvious. She was amazed at the male, if not to say phallic nature of the architecture and wanted comment on it from a female point of view.

A struggle with preconceived notions awaited her. "The grandeur and power of this new city appealed to me and I had all sorts of assumptions." She was certain that the district would be filled with well-dressed yuppies who populated the area during the day and left the skyscrapers to their fate at night.

The truth turned out to be totally different. "Unlike similar districts elsewhere in the world, in the Zuidas the majority of men and women dress very casually. The atmosphere is relaxed and the lights in the offices stay on until eleven o'clock at night."

**DELIVERANCE**

Little by little she studied the people, followed their movements, looked for traces of pleasure in addition to signs of hard work and discovered a remarkable everyday phenomenon.

**ANAT STAINBERG  
PERFORMANCEKUNSTENAAR, DICHTER**

De uit Israël afkomstige Anat Stainberg houdt van esthetische, aan dans verwante interventies. Maar in haar happenings draait niet alles om schoonheid. Ze reflecteert ook op de positie van de vrouw in de maatschappij en speelde eerder in op actuele onderwerpen als oorlog en identiteit.

Niet vreemd dat ze was geïnteresseerd in een tijdelijk verblijf aan de Zuidas. Ze houdt van variatie, wilde worden opgeschud door de voor haar ongebruikelijke manier van werken. 'Normaal heb ik eerst een idee', zegt Stainberg met uitzicht op haar onderzoeksgebied, 'en zoek ik handvaten om mijn idee uit te voeren. Nu was ik nieuwsgierig naar het buitengewoon algemene onderwerp.'

Gezien haar feministische invalshoek lag haar eerste fascinatie voor de hand. Ze stond versteld van de mannelijke, om niet te zeggen fallische uitstraling van de architectuur en wilde daar vanuit een vrouwelijke invalshoek commentaar op leveren.

Vervolgens wachtte haar een gevecht met vooroordelen. 'Ik voelde me aangetrokken tot de grootsheid en de macht van deze nieuwe stad en werd overspoeld door veronderstellingen.' Ze was er zeker van dat de stadswijk zou zijn gevuld met goedgeklede yuppen, die het gebied overdag bevolken en de torens 's avonds aan hun lot overlaten.

Niks bleek minder waar. 'Anders dan in soortgelijke wijken elders op de wereld, is op de Zuidas een grote hoeveelheid mannen en vrouwen extreem casual gekleed. De sfeer is ontspannen en in de kantoren brandt tot elf uur 's avonds licht.'

**VERLOSSING**

Gaandeweg verdiepte ze zich in de mensen, volgde hun bewegingen, zocht naast tekenen van hard werken naar sporen van plezier en ontdekte een opmerkelijk, dagelijks terugkerend fenomeen. 'Tussen acht en tien uur 's morgens stromen de

“Between eight and ten o’clock in the morning, the people pour out of the trains and head toward their offices. They all walk in the same tempo; they all have the same disengaged look in their eyes.”

Stainberg calls it a look of deliverance, in which people have already left the worries of home behind them so as to dedicate themselves to the big, important transactions awaiting them up ahead.

Now, two months before the final presentation, she is overcome by the doubt which is so often part of the creative process. Chances are good, however, that she will isolate the act of walking – including the universal tempo and the universal facial expression – from time and place and enlarge it into dance or theatre.

Probably she will place herself between the working people while walking and make a video recording of the act of walking in order to integrate it in a personal happening.

This ultimate “re-enactment of an act” certainly has aesthetic dimensions, but Stainberg is also offering a mirror, a moment of contemplation about the role and importance of work in our society. “I think it’s strange that I have been able to find so few signs of fun on the way to work, but I recognize that in myself as well. Like the workers in the Zuidas, I enjoy working hard and obsessively. With this happening, I am wondering why work plays such a great role – as if it gives a higher meaning to life. As if working is life.”

Invited by:  
Amsterdam Art Fund

mensen vanuit de trein naar hun kantoren. Daarbij lopen ze allemaal in hetzelfde tempo, hebben ze allemaal dezelfde, onthechte blik.’

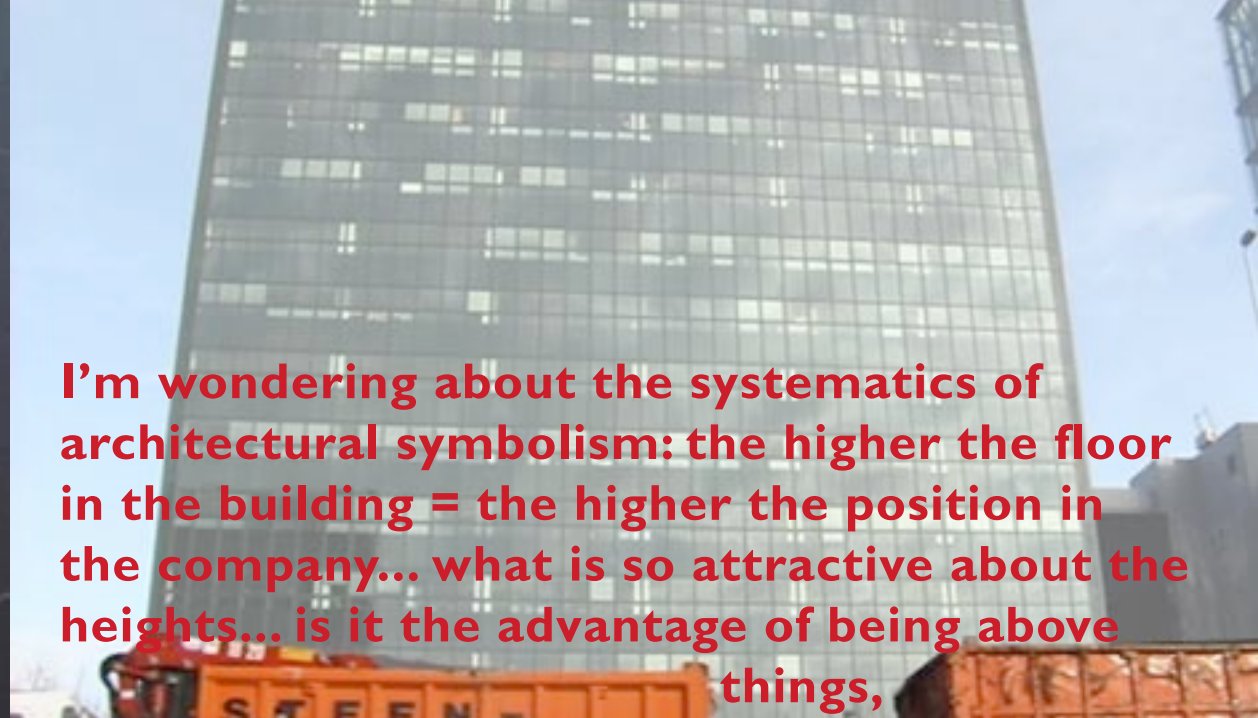
Stainberg noemt het een blik van verlossing, waarin mensen de beslommeringen van thuis al hebben achtergelaten om zich over te geven aan de belangrijke, grote transacties die in de verte wachten. Twee maanden voor de eindpresentatie wordt ze overvallen door de twijfel die nu eenmaal hoort bij het maakproces. Maar de kans is groot dat ze de actie van het lopen, inclusief het universele tempo en de universele gelaatsuitdrukking, losweekt van plaats en tijd en uitvergroet tot dans of theater. Vermoedelijk plaatst ze zichzelf al lopend tussen het werkvolk, neemt de actie met videocamera op om de registratie vervolgens te integreren in een persoonlijke happening.

Die uiteindelijke ‘re-enactment van een act’ heeft ongetwijfeld esthetische dimensies, maar Stainberg biedt ook een spiegel, een moment van contemplatie op de rol en het belang van werk in onze samenleving. ‘Ik vind het vreemd dat ik op de weg naar het werk zo weinig tekenen heb kunnen vinden van fun, maar herken dat ook bij mezelf. Ik ben net als de werkers van de Zuidas ook graag hard en obsessief aan het werk. Door deze happening uit te voeren, vraag ik me af waarom werk zo’n grote rol speelt, alsof het een hogere betekenis geeft aan het leven. Alsof werken leven is.’

Uitgenodigd door:  
Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst



Going to the top,  
stopped at the foyer



I'm wondering about the systematics of architectural symbolism: the higher the floor in the building = the higher the position in the company... what is so attractive about the heights... is it the advantage of being above things, of having a detached overview of everything, of not meddling with the grounds and dirt of reality... is it an imitation of the act of flying, of being beyond human, like a GOD... seeing all, knowing all and controlling everyone... or is it maybe just the result of building on high-priced land...

## looking for The Way In

I move into my rooms at the former convent in the Zuidas. I decide to visit the office building area at different hours every day, looking for my Way In this project and serve my curiosity with specific subjects. Immediately impressed by the cold, detached working atmosphere, I choose to invest in the 'social space', the people, and the way they 'work' with the architectural surroundings.

Inspired by the promise of power and importance in the Zuidas architecture and on the faces of the pedestrians, I'm curious to climb to a high position. On the assumption that the best understanding comes from physical experience, I decide to go to the rooftop of Amsterdam's World Trade Center building in order to get a good point of view.

Whatever it is, the WTC rooftop is a semi-public space, hence a restricted area. As I don't have the right documents, I'm stopped at the foyer.

**I must awaken  
the people here, save  
them from an  
automatic fall into  
a senseless sleep  
while living.**

**Yes!**

**I will be their Superwoman;  
Jump from building  
to building  
ferociously, rescue people  
from boredom and sadness.**

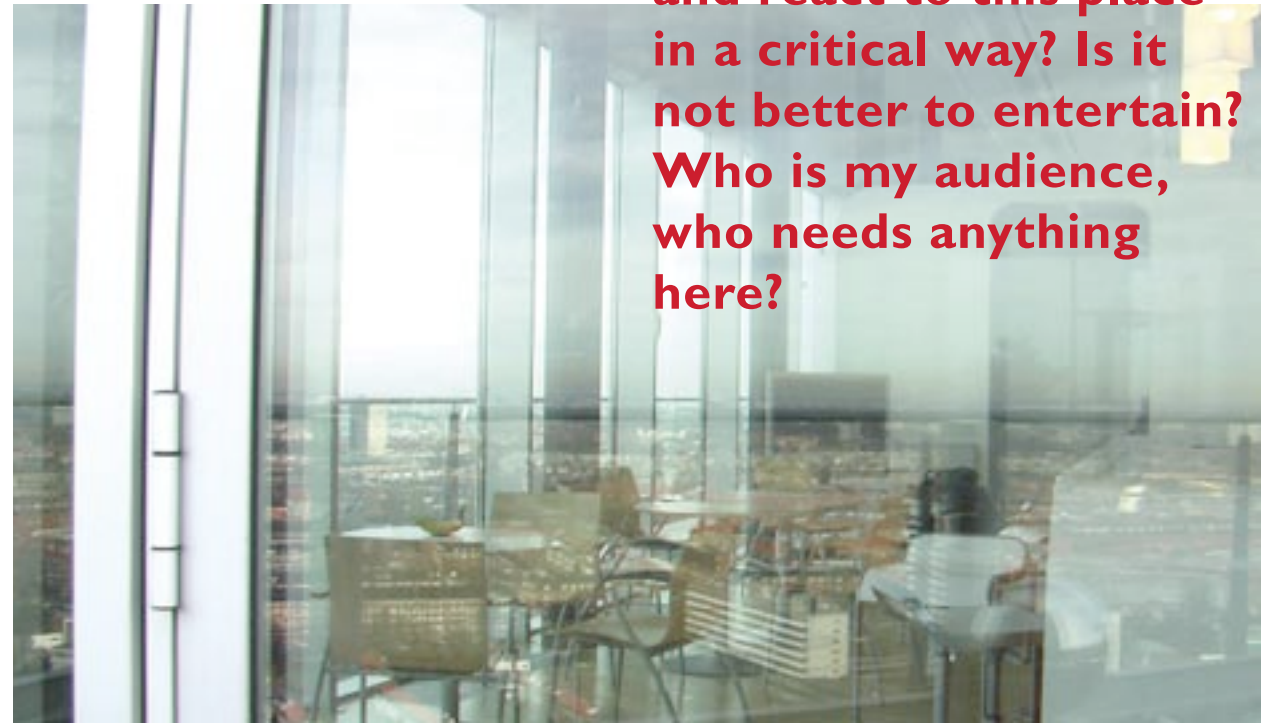
**I'll comfort them,  
I'll bring them  
colour,  
joy,  
life.**



Never occurred to me that the people working here probably choose this type of life and might enjoy the resulting financial security, for example. They might not want to be saved at all. And the meaningless boredom is probably my own, as I don't have a clear target yet. And my voyeur-like 'wandering around' seems very unrelated to these goal-oriented surroundings.

I try to grab onto something, but I find no human traces to cling to, nothing old, no past to hold onto. Everything is new, immediately created in its final form: from the paper to the ground, very designed, complete, perfect. Very big in terms of human scale – vast, transparent and at the same time invisible, unapproachable – limited access, hierarchical, impressive, computerized. This is the future centre of the city, the brochure says, and it's developing very differently than the organic urban growth we are familiar with, leaving nothing to the private individual, no leftovers of someone's presence. In other city centres, graffiti artists write their 'word' on the walls for people to see; they appeal to what seems to be a responsive world. In the Zuidas, though it is crowded at times, no anonymous rebellion is to be seen. No one is interested, and even I, with all my private superwoman fantasies, gradually transform into a 'production robot' in order to realize my ideas, from the moment I enter the place, at 6,7,8,9 am in the morning, until I supposedly leave at 6,7,8,9,10,11 pm at night.

**What should I do here?  
What am I here for?  
Do I dare to reflect on  
and react to this place  
in a critical way? Is it  
not better to entertain?  
Who is my audience,  
who needs anything  
here?**



Sitting in the foyer of the big WTC building, waiting for the guard to release me, I notice a prominent sound: silence, broken only by the high heel shoes on the marble floor and the occasional laughter of people on their mobile phones. A dominant, specific hollow silence, as if it is an empty aquarium, or a container for documents, signed and un-signed, transferred from floor to floor, in a regulated manner, systematized.





**... Hello my name is Anat  
and I'm a workaholic..!**

dishonest about past experiences  
and present capabilities. can't hang  
around. always in the process of  
accomplishing something  
worthwhile. must appear more  
competent. very influenced. hard to  
give credit. **embarrassed**  
**to be praised, live for**  
**it. schedule more than**  
**can handle, do it faster,**  
**and faster.** people will not  
respect me as I am. always in a fog.  
take it personally. never mention a  
failure. project based. successful.  
never satisfied. never free. never on  
vacation. 'night kit' in the office.  
new work is a new meaning to life.  
sleep and playtime seem like a  
waste. solving work-related  
problems during time off. **best**  
**way to get inspired -**  
glass of wine and some crappy

Devoted to my work, I keep on  
searching for The Way In. I decide to  
tackle the office building area;  
I will go there at night.

dance performance. **have only work-related friends.** tiredness, irritability, social isolation. physical stress symptoms – headaches, insomnia, shortness of breath, racing heart, muscle tension, ulcers. no time for you. always looking for ways to excel. stress serves as fuel to do more. perfectionist. scared that these feelings **will swallow me whole.** find it difficult to hold a conversation about anything else indispensable. unable to delegate. **focus on results.** work is a modern addiction. simultaneous activities. **right now,** I'm busy taking care of my future. skip lunch, rush through dinner. to make more. expectations to become 'Super Woman'. earning money for work brings a measure of personal satisfaction and affirmation of worth. go 'on empty'. vocational achievements tied up with self-image. though it is only a temporary, quick fix. **one million dollars is not enough. go for the second, and then the third.** "Is that all there is?" excessive denial. it wasn't always this way. there is a comforting, direct relationship between the work I do and its consequences.

Maybe the shadowy, deserted dark offices will scare me so much I will get inspired. I go there several times between 10 pm and midnight, but no matter when I visit, it is never dangerous and I'm never alone. The place is always full of light and people. It makes me wonder about their working habits; don't they ever go home? It also makes me wonder about my working habits, as I am working at the same midnight as well. I decide to peep on people's working habits – in the morning.

I start shooting people in their offices, from the outside through the glass. Peeping on them in a polite way, not intrusive. Keeping the imagined separation between us. At the same time I collect info in relation to working habits, from the Internet, from books and from people I meet during this time.

**'When I look at a hollow well,  
the well looks right back at me.'**  
(freely translated from Nietzsche)







Stage

I find myself caught up in the obvious race to 'make it', to succeed and achieve something. My background in drama (theatre actress) demands an audience – a large quantity of people present at a certain time in one place. I play a game with the Zuidas rules (as I read them). I choose a daily routine: every morning from 08:20 till 09:00, I meet my 'colleagues' on the exit bridge from the WTC train station to the offices in the buildings around there.

## The Way In



Watching them, I'm struck by a surprising similarity of movement and timing; they are all rushing to the office in the same tempo. I'm intrigued by, and jealous of, their concerned faces as well – so focused and targeted, as if they are already living in the next minute, maybe even closing the big deal that will bring them to the stars. There is a sense of deliverance in the air, as if *'something is happening here but you don't know what it is'* (Bob Dylan). The 'unified' behaviour looks like a designed performance, like a dance. I will make it my stage.

As the people I politely peep on enter my world, my memory, my experiences and perception of reality, I have an urge to get hold of them. Comparing myself to the people I watch, I'm curious to observe their souls. But I don't want to judge or expose them. I decide to accomplish this by an action: I draw their faces from memory and try to represent their identities from my point of view.





From 08:20 till 09:00 in the morning of April 27, 2007, I am walking on a home trainer, positioned on this bridge. Listening to a compilation of songs that expand upon the subject of 'Way' and make me feel good while I'm walking.

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