

UNTRAINING THE BAUHAUS  
 A NON-LINEAR WORKFLOW FOR THE NEW (POST-HU)MAN  
 BY MORITZ FRISCHKORN AND THOMAS PEARCE

To train is to repeat.

In his clockwork choreographies, Bauhaus gymnastics teacher Jakob Klenke (1876–1941) repeated, like his mentor Oskar Schlemmer, the graceful movements of the machine age. Through his practice, he hoped to train a form of empathy with the non-human other—side-stepping inherited, habitual human perception.

To repeat is to dissolve.

Klenke's work as a choreographer and movement educator needs to be seen within the context of his time. The ideal of producing, by means of training, a 'New Man' envisioned physical exercise as a way not only to strengthen the individual body, but above all to prepare the self for its dissolution into the collective body of a political ideology—for example, that of communism or fascism. Klenke is a disobedient product of this environment.

To repeat is to invent.

Klenke himself is a 'New Man', a fictional character produced by a collective of performance and architectural researchers in 2014. In order to subvert canonized narratives of the Bauhaus, we needed to reshuffle the cards of history—as Klenke himself once wrote: 'We have taken enough from the past; now is the time to give it something in return.'

To invent is to expand.

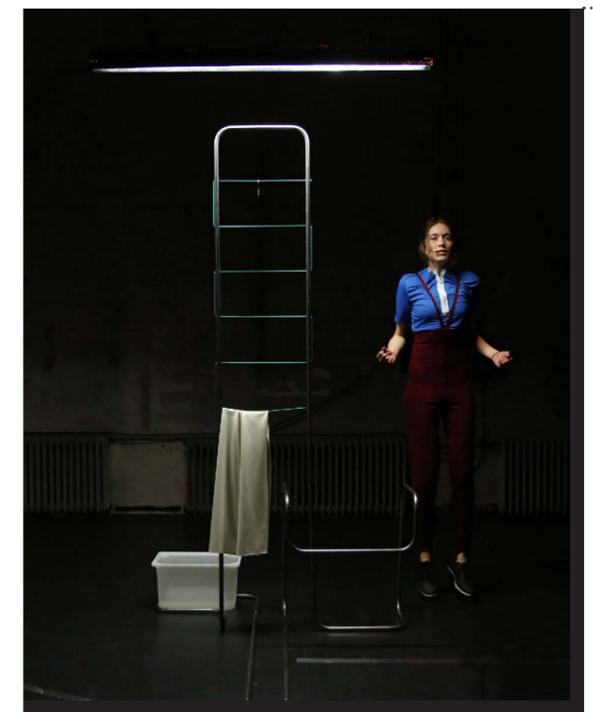
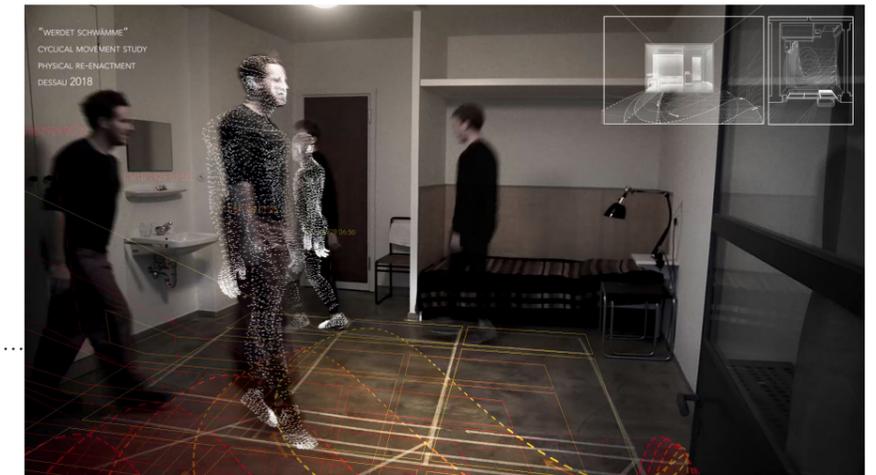
Klenke functions as a device to smuggle, through the historiographical back door of re-enactment, an alternative gymnastics practice into the historical Bauhaus. Klenke exposed his body to gamma rays, imagined himself as an octopus, experimented with coloured glasses and perforated plates. By altering our sensual wiring, his practice produces a body that is fragile, porous and indeterminate, enabling an expansion of perception into the non-human realm.

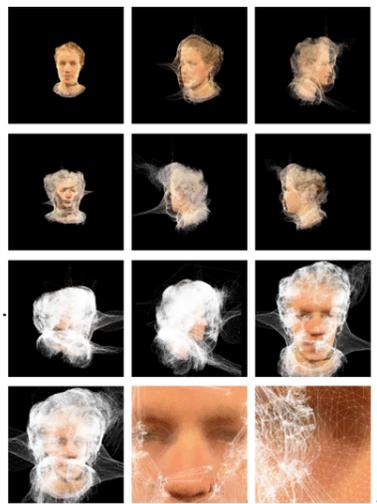
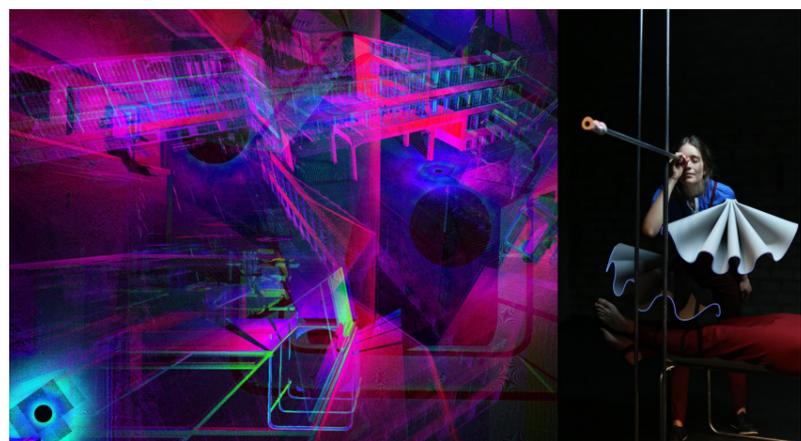
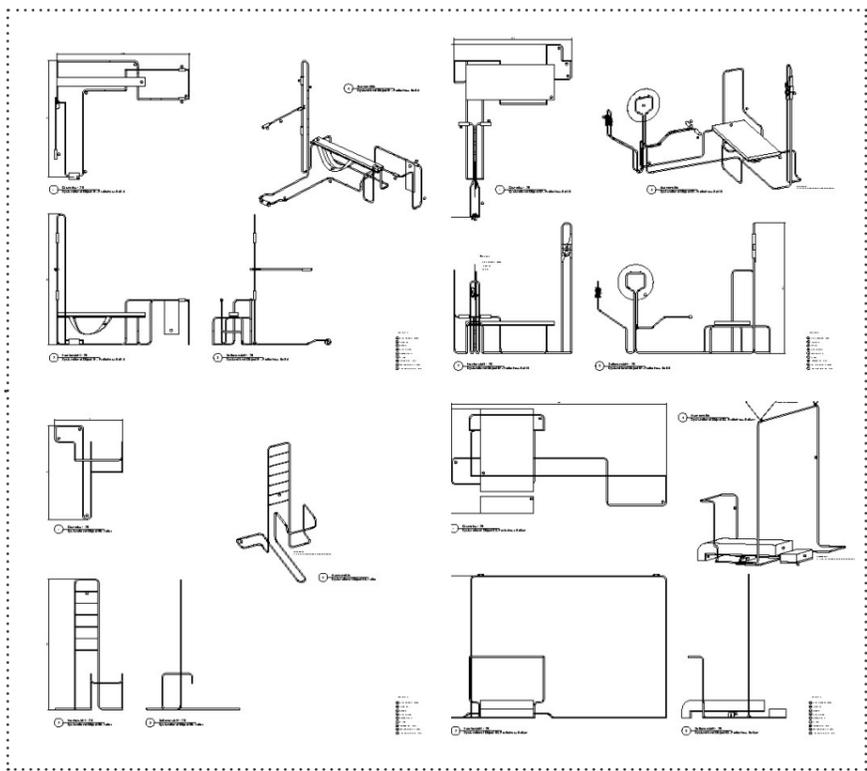
To invent is to assemble.

Our method of reconstruction involved field work, site-specific re-enactment, 3D scanning, animation and digital fabrication. Bit by bit, our reconstructions (and reconstructions of reconstructions) accumulated the layers of Klenke's bodily practice and its architectural and environmental framing. During a series of live performances at Kampnagel (Hamburg) and during the 2019 'Bauhaus100' centennial, this multi-layered assemblage was actualized as a hybrid stage set—at once exhibition and gymnastics studio—in which the audience encountered digital and physical projections of Klenke's training practice. Visitors were invited to actively participate in our reconstruction process, for example by taking one of Klenke's gymnastics classes.

To repeat is to become machine.

Central to Klenke's gymnastic practice (and its reconstruction) were a series of indeterminate training instruments: hybridizations of historical Bauhaus furniture, architectural reconstructions and contemporary fitness apparatuses. Suggesting, but never fulfilling functionality, ambiguity is designed into them: the precise nature of what exactly is being trained remains elusive. Hence, the open-ended instruments can be understood as affordances for performers and audience alike to simultaneously reformulate the contemporary training body and reinvent the historical body of Jakob Klenke.





**To repeat is to project.**  
 Throughout the performance, the training body appears as a digitized one, governed by regimes of 'performance measurement': digital technologies of tracking and quantifying bodily functions. Many of the early twentieth-century totalizing fantasies of moulding a 'New Man' are traceable to the present, having mutated into notions of self-optimization, a modulation that is more subtle and less graspable but still aims at fabricating productive and docile bodies. We have projected, onto the adaptation and alienation of historic gymnastic practices (for example, Jørgen Peter Müller's 'My System' from 1904, which forms the basis of Klenke's gymnastics classes), contemporary preoccupations of training and entrainment.

**To project is to contaminate.**  
 Like the techniques of performance measurement, the technologies we use for our process of reconstruction and re-enactment are far from neutral. They modulate history, leaving their guilty fingerprints all over the object of reconstruction. The experience of navigating a 3D-LiDAR-scanned point cloud of Klenke's studio space confronts us with the strangeness and otherness of the machine's vision and, by extension, the unbridgeable distance between ourselves and the historical performance culture we are re-appropriating.

**To become machine is to become other.**  
 The porous and indeterminate body produced by Klenke's training practice is gradually opened up to environmental stimuli and technological interfaces. It becomes, literally and ontologically, machine. Or rather: it combines with other components to constitute a machinic assemblage, resonating with the very ideological machinations it is attempting to subvert. Only by drawing level with the ultra-high resolution and subtle modulations of the technologies entraining neoliberal imperatives, which imperceptibly shift according to the obscure rules and demands of the market, can we formulate alternative subjectivities, which are instead porous, open-ended and unruly.

**To become other is to dissolve.**  
 As part of the re-training of history and body, performers and public engage in speculative perception exercises, which aim to modulate our sensual wiring, extending our bodily flows and veins into those of the electric currents, photons and data streams. In this state of hyper-extended, technologically enhanced perception we begin to dissolve; we become the very data items and electronic bits that determine our bodies, and that have enabled our reconstruction. To see through the eye of the machine is to train seeing through the eye of the other—both the historical and the machinic other.

**To dissolve is to untrain.**  
 We become multiple. Traversed by historic lines of ideology and technology, both reconstructed and invented, fixed identities dissolve. Our heads and bodies become an unstable rendering, shifting and modulating between many digitized physiognomies—a many-headed hydra in which different bodily features and time scales collapse. To train is to repeat and hence is a historiographical practice: by inserting ourselves into a history of fabricated bodies we have the potential to fabricate them differently, untraining dominant historiographical narratives and dominant techniques of power simultaneously. This is what Klenke can do. He is a subversion of historical and contemporary flow charts leading towards Newness (and Manness), a subversion from within—an affordance to repeat differently.

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