

## Statement of Intent: “Secondary Residency”

28 January 2023

From the outset, we have wanted our “work” to be the result of a dramaturgy and research of sorts which involve meeting with inhabitants, non-profit organisations and local actors in Anderlecht in order to listen to them and start a conversation.

The first position we share as a collective is most certainly down to our paths in life. We are a performance artist, an activist resident who is also an artist working to get people involved in civic life, and a political representative interested in cultural issues and collective dynamics.

When we met some members of the research group via the Escale du Nord cultural centre and Anne Watthée (who gave us a detailed description of the project as well as the non-profit organisation Cultureghem’s desires and potential cultural focus areas), we realised that multiculturalism was something the two groups of local people in different places (Escale du Nord and Cultureghem) aspired to but weren’t yet living out.

It was from this observation that the outline of our art project started to emerge. The theme delivered by the reflection group - “super-party, super-multiculturalism” - was simple and complicated at the same time and could indeed launch us towards all kinds of different tracks and ideas.

Initially, we had to work by elimination and define what we didn’t want:

- to supplant community workers by organising a neighbourhood party,
- to give way to the “snobbery” of an elitist contemporary production,
- to be pretentious enough to believe that we could solve all (or even one of) the social, cultural and community-related issues experienced in the region in one week.

### The form of “the work”

Using a process of elimination, we were able to outline what we wanted to produce. The actions of certain artists much admired by each member of the trio inspired our approach and allowed us to refine the “work” into a **GAME**

And not just any game: a traditional folk game created by people for people, but also a simple act offering a meeting point. It’s an active, physical game that belongs to its space. This game must also be meaningful, encourage people to reflect and offer something poetic and constructive.

### The location of “the work”

But where should our action take place? As we stroll towards the residence, we are almost immediately struck by the many bridges around the area.

“**Bridges**” are a place where people meet, pass by and cross over and have a symbolic value according to several of the residents we met.

These bridges link neighbourhoods on either side of the canal, forming a kind of river of Brussels locals.

One bridge in particular draws our attention. It lets both trains and pedestrians cross the water and represents a border between two neighbourhoods (the Cureghem and Rue Wayez districts), reminding us of our question around multiculturalism. The bridge evokes the history of the 1990s,

when a “Welcome to Anderlecht” sign was placed - supposedly temporarily - at the entrance to Rue Wayez on one side of the bridge. The reaction from Cureghem’s inhabitants was swift. They shouted from the rooftops that they refused to let their neighbourhood be forgotten. This turn of events raised people’s awareness that a district was being neglected. As a result, we made the bridge a decisive element in our project.

### **Choosing a game**

With all this in mind, we decided our game would be a “**tug of war**”. Needless to say, this sports activity pits two teams against each other in a show of strength. It is traditional to many countries, including China, India and Cambodia. It arrived in Europe in the 19th century and is also practised at major festivals in Japan, South Korea and Indonesia, as well as at leading American universities. It is known as “sokatira” in the Basque Country and “kadodo” in Togo.

The action in question is clearly “pulling others towards oneself”, and by doing so a person wins a round and defeats their opponent while looking them in the face. It is also evocative of a party or celebration or even a festival organised by each team.

Since 1987, two Japanese cities bordering the prefectures of Shizuoka and Nagano, Hamamatsu and Iida, have clashed in an annual tug of war game called the “Battle for the Mountain Pass” which reenacts an ancient war over land. The symbolic stakes are the unofficial border between the two prefectures, which advances into the defeated camp’s side by one metre every time. A sign marking the boundary established during the competition is then set up on the pass. However, this frontier determined by the game is not officially recognised.

### **How can we adapt the game for our “work”?**

The first idea was to put on a big performance staged in grand style, creating a satire on tug of war which would see two teams from two different districts on either side of a bridge humorously confront and make fun of each other.

But we very quickly ran into a question: how could we constitute the teams so they don’t automatically replicate standard categories and stereotypes? How would we throw into question commonly accepted “categories”, be they social, territorial or community-based?

. By seeking to create teams, we were falling into the same trap of closing down categories and confining their members to social or territorial groupings or communities on each side of the rope. Again and again, we were getting enmeshed in stereotypes and prejudices. We didn’t yet understand how to poeticize, transform or at least change the way we looked at the question of categorisation. So how could we move beyond commonly defined categories? A conversation with CIFAS members helped us to make rapid progress.

### **The form and title of the work:**

#### **“Bienvenue/Welkom in Anderlecht” (Welcome to Anderlecht)**

“Bienvenue/Welkom in Anderlecht” is an artistic proposal based on a theme suggested by Anderlecht residents, “the super-multicultural super-party”. It brings a playful, reflexive, cheeky and chimerical outlook (or response?) much like a poem, based on a few observations.

The first is that a super-multicultural super-party is apparently difficult to organise.

People who live or work in different places in the Anderlecht district seem to want the super-party to be more super-multicultural in the areas they occupy or use. So where should we have the party? Is it necessary? Does everyone want it? How can we draw people's attention in a gentle way to the fact that sometimes our desire to meet others turns into a desire to have them come to us?

And to the fact that a multicultural approach predicates categorising people according to their culture, social class or geographical location?

The work is a silent film shown on a loop in several public places. The film is of a performance also given in a public space,

- namely a tug of war that brings together two teams in a space between two places. They are on either side of a bridge in Anderlecht. The teams are made up of local people we met in Anderlecht. They are divided into two random categories.
- The performance itself moves between several Anderlecht bridges around the Cureghem district. 16 actors living in Anderlecht will be dressed in costumes that are yet to be determined. (They might be medieval, folkloric or Japanese, for example). One resident will be designated the ringleader. Under each (railway) bridge, we have two named teams that oppose each other from either side. Before the contest begins, a boundary line is drawn in the middle of the bridge (using a paint pot with a hole in the bottom). The tug of war begins with both teams warming up on either side in an amusing way. The competition begins under the watchful eye of the ringleader. The losing team is the one that crosses the boundary. A marking is then made at the place where the first competitor from the losing team stepped over the boundary. The mark is made either on the ground or on the bridge wall by the ringleader, along with the date of the competition and the names of the winning and losing teams. The teams then walk towards the second bridge (ideally we would choose the double-arch bridge on Rue des Goujons) where they have another contest. The teams are made up differently this time. A mark is made again. The teams then go to the Rue du Sel bridge, realign themselves and start to play - but this time, the result is different. Each team pulling on the rope will get closer to one another and meet at the boundary. They will both win, joyfully celebrating their reunion. This is the "super-multicultural super-party" :)

**We are still to define** how the work will be shared. Ideally, we would like the film to be shown on a loop in several unusual locations in Anderlecht's neighbourhoods. Examples include under a bridge, on the façade of a building, on a TV in a bar, in a shop window or on a breakfast plate :). These dreams will undoubtedly come to terms with reality during production discussions between Nicolas and CIFAS.

**Who will author the work?** Our initial assumption is that all three people will put their signature to the work (but this will be decided at the end).

**An outline of the technical needs:**

19 people paid for a day's filming (16 participants, one ringleader, two camera operators).

2 days of editing.

Authorisation to be under bridges and make marks: to be checked by production.

Costumes: donated or hired.

There will be no casting call in advance, and teams will be created from the meetings that Nicolas will organise with non-profit organisations and local residents. All the background to the performance will be explained to them, as well as the “secondary residency” process that led to this production. The project will continue to be subject to discussion, with the other members of the trio consulted about each stage. For example, group names.

Sunday 29 January 2023

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