

Rehearsing Between Dog and Wolf

*Rehearsing Between Dog and Wolf* at der TANK is a collaborative exhibition that features contributions from Alice Tioli, Linus Riegger, Lorenz Walter Wernli and Ilja Zaharov.

*The following is a an edited compilation of texts that emerged during the planning of this exhibition:*

Rehearsal encapsulates a paradox. In rehearsing, we move between programmatic repetition—revising procedures, establishing and committing to patterns, advancing toward a goal—and the simultaneous indulgence in spontaneous reinterpretations, interruptions, and alterations to the underlying score. These are the moments where we tease out what black and white cannot contain, perhaps even discovering improvements. This involves improvisation, spur-of-the-moment decisions, happy accidents. Indeed, we love to surprise ourselves. In this way, rehearsal embodies a movement built on the tension between decision and rule, free play and routine—a movement akin to dance: steps forward, steps backward. It's not choreography, but a motion that the tired eye might mistake for one.

I thought about the French phrase „Entre chien et loup“—literally, between dog and wolf. It stems from the shepherd's task, where the survival of the flock depends on distinguishing between the two animals. But for now, let's sit with this: entre chien et loup refers to dusk, when the light dims to the point where one can't tell a dog from a wolf. It's a metaphor for thresholds, for liminal spaces where the known shifts to the unknown, safety slips into danger, and day collapses into night. It's about a blurred line, a moment in flux. There's a continuum between dog and wolf. But it's neither a gradient nor a spectrum, it has no middle and its constituent elements aren't arranged in any clear, comprehensible order. In fact, from afar the shape of this continuum is indistinguishable from the one of rehearsing between decision and rule.

I'm suspicious of how attractive this metaphor is, though. It smells like a trend, like another signal flare sent up to mark familiar ideas. A kind of conceptual acquiescence, this easy leaning on a phrase to evoke something nebulous—transition, ambiguity, change. Who could argue? But perhaps it's not even acquiescence; maybe it's just harmless, a gesture towards something easily digestible, something we can all nod along with. Comfortable and vague, a space to fill with intellectual gloss.

To actually contribute requires more than just calling up familiar words. It means rephrasing, reimagining the liminal, understanding it as more than just a placeholder. It means living in that space between the dog and the wolf, where things are unclear, wild yet domestic and uncontainable. Not just gesturing at it, but inhabiting it fully.

Sometimes we don't know how things come together, but they do, and when they do, it feels exhilarating.

Picture this: just another day, coffee in hand, committed to the day's tasks. Or let me put it this way: I drank my coffee, I'm committed to the day's tasks. Today, I'm determined to finish what must be done. I'm writing something for an occasion—details don't matter. With cold feet, courtesy of crossing some caffeine threshold, I linger in front of my bookshelf. I wouldn't call it a library. I pick out a few titles, hoping they'll guide me, motivate me, breathe life into this session. The ritual commences as I flip through pages, scanning for something. I don't have a clear image in mind. Rather it must take on shape during this process. The books scatter to the floor. The ritual gains momentum. I'm writing, mixing, concocting a recipe on the fly, hoping it will summon a coherent text. If I just believe hard enough, it will materialize. A leap of faith, the way all real things come into being.

There's a momentum, a pulse, driven by a kind of magical thinking. I pull words, phrases, even whole paragraphs, arranging them like an incantation. I'm all in, even as I feel it slipping away. The ritual doesn't mind the edge of sense and nonsense. I ignore the inner eye-rolls, the rational voice telling me to start over. This is the levity of the desperate. It's like cooking a delicate dish from scraps and instinct—half the ingredients may be illusions, but who cares?

It won't make sense tomorrow, maybe not even in an hour, but right now, these words shout back. an ephemeral answer that exists for a breath, then dissolves like mist when the ritual is over. A momentary, fervent belief in serendipity.

I'm recounting this story from memory. Spinning the tale to my liking if necessary. And for your information, I haven't read a word of his before. Kerouac is dwelling behind his typewriter struggling to bring something to paper. As it often seems to be the case, the jump from not-writing to writing could lead to a broken neck. Nonetheless the writer cannot quit, the task is too pertinent, even if he doesn't yet know why. At some decisive point in his nebulous past he was shackled by a commitment to something great(er) yet to come. He's Catholic. A car horn in front of his home announces the arrival of his friends as he warms up the keys of the typewriter with his fingertips. His roommate storms in, it's time. Time to go to the party. Did Kerouac expect their arrival? Perhaps not, especially since it's a weekday. Time to enjoy and slack off with girls and liquor. His roommate smacks his meaty palm into Keroauc's shoulder but his body doesn't reply. Keroauc retreated into his head space. Let's go! Jack, we need to leave! The car horn is impatient. Nobody is willing to wait a second. Wait for what? In any case, the image of the 1950's corvette or whatever filled to the brim with his buddies, not moving until he squeezes himself in between them, puts him in distress.

The writer has no time to waste, no spare room in his mind for something other than writing, since the activity of writing always requires one to be removed from the world around. Yet, here are his friends pulling him back outside. Back into the world of simple pleasures and complex desires. His roommate is in his ear, inching in on the writer-mini-me crawled up in his skull, trying to get a hold of him. However, the writer in Kerouac is elusive and still determined to write. Locked in, Keroauc is shackled to the writing device and mentally aloof. But he must go to the party. Car horn. The world is waiting. At last, in a split second decision Kerouac hammers away on the typewriter. His fingers move faster than ever before and his brain leaks onto the page like nothing perceived previously. The writer seems in sync with his rhythm of thought. Keroauc will call this “writing the truth.” Lights enter through the window opposite of the writer and his roommate. The corvette's headlights render the two into white blobs. Let's get on with it! His friends' calls and the roaring of the engine become indistinguishable. Kerouac is still typing as if it's the only thing in the world. Something is happening. He feels levity and pressure simultaneously, too peculiar to comprehend immediately, so defer. And at once he is done, his roommate jumps through the window into the white void of the headlights just as Keroauc regains reign over his body and springs up like a Jack in the box. As he tears the fresh paper out of the typewriter, arms reach through the window and yank him right in between the familiar faces on the backseats. On the way to the party Keroauc hands his day's work to his roommate to skim through. The corvette is a storm, hence it's windy and noisy and kind of drunk and uncomfortable. Nonetheless his roommate is able to make his comment heard. This is definitively the best piece of writing you have ever produced. This left bewilderment on Kerouac's face. But after reading what he had produced he conceded. It's true.

The writer needed to write so he could go on not writing. Kerouac witnessed a miracle that he himself was the source of. He created a moment in time that occurred beside itself. Held at gunpoint between writing and not-writing he did the impossible and did both. Bypassing the work good prose takes. Immediacy. No inhibitions, language like raw material. What exactly happened has no explanation that lies on this side of language, so it must become fantasy, myth and a legend at last. Accelerationism before its time. Speed supreme and so on. It's true. This was the best thing he had ever written. In the final rehearsal he knew to let go of all that made sense. For that, it is a miracle, even if I don't buy it totally. The true miracle does not depend on its believers, you see. In fact, it might be the opposite since the miracle has nothing to gain from already-believers and it can only persuade the heretics. Keroauc didn't believe in the miracle either, it just happened. He wasn't even really there for it because he was too immersed in it. There was nothing holding him back except nothing itself. He was exactly zero units away from writing the best and the fastest piece ever.

*Ilja Zaharov, 2024*