

THE LANGUAGE OF PAIN

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a multidisciplinary exploration of human emotions | by Andrés Locatelli & Jeffrey Döring

Is empathy possible without pain? In this project, we invite the audience to participate in an immersive experience to explore our relationship with pain today in its physical, symbolic, individual and collective forms.

With this proposal, shaped as an explorative concert performance with works by Claudio Monteverdi, we intend to draw the members of the public into the current multidisciplinary debate on emotions, pain and empathy.

Pain Today

Once mainly a philosophical, medical and artistic topic, pain and sorrow have recently attracted the interests of historians, anthropologists and neuroscientists alike. Thus, the relatively new field of Emotions History has increasingly focused on the interaction between feelings and power throughout the centuries, whereas neuroscientists have unveiled the essential brain mechanisms of pain, empathy, social rejection and exclusion. At the same time, anthropologists from all branches have inquired into the suffering of body and mind in different cultures in an effort to understand the languages, values and social practices associated with it. Recently, contemporary thinkers have manifested concern for the ethical, political and social consequences of how today's society deals with pain through its new medical and communicational devices.

The rapid advance of clinical research is making physical pain more and more treatable and this nourishes the utopia of a painless world. Unrestricted access to painkillers has become a global problem that often results in harmful consumption and addiction. The digital era, with its disembodied forms of communication and its often toxic cult of positivity and stereotypes, promotes a narcissistic ethos in which pain is increasingly perceived as purely negative. For millennia, the concept of suffering has been at the core of Western and Eastern culture, philosophy and religion. In these contexts, pain has been considered essential in the path towards cognition, awareness and enlightenment. In today's *palliative*

society, the experience of pain appears instead as devoid of sense. We are so afraid of seeing pain in ourselves and others that we often end up depriving it of its voice. Thus, the essential mechanism of empathy ('com-passion') is compromised in its foundations. The collective perception of pain - a necessary condition for change and transformation - is then strongly discouraged and even suffocated. Meanwhile, hugely popular phenomena (summarizable with the fitness motto *no pain, no gain*) indicate that we may enable forms of controllable pain when they are functional to attaining personal pleasure or social acceptance. In a present dominated by digital media, wealth concentration, environmental crisis and social discard, new forms of desensitization, violence, and cruelty arise that are physical, symbolic, individual and collective.

Is it desirable, then, to live in a world without pain? As artists and researchers working on historical and contemporary matters, we feel brought into play by the social relevance of these issues. We witness how the very experience of art risks being undermined if we evade empathy and oversimplify existential topics such as pain. With this creative proposal, we want to share our belief that alternative cultural references can be envisioned by investigating and re-signifying our artistic heritage while exploring new experimental formats to enjoy it.



The Performance [deconstructing the concert format]

As they walk into the concert hall, members of the public assist to an apparently regular concert situation. However, during the introductory music piece they will begin to perceive slightly atypical conducts in the musicians that will gradually unveil the actual nature of the performance. Indeed, each of the performers will be playing a specific role in the progressive deconstruction of the concert format in front of the audience's eyes. Thus, the stage will begin to turn into an open space that will serve as a frame for fluid musical-dramaturgical situations around the topics of pain and empathy. The ritual of the concert will be thus questioned and dismantled into dialogs, monologues, musical pieces and actions that will sometimes involve the spectators.

At all times, the interaction between spectators and actors will be discretionary and will allow different levels of immersion: from observation to active participation in the performance. Our objective is to trigger in the audience a somatic-emotional response as well as a reflection on the physical, symbolic and cultural nature of pain and our historical and current approaches to it. In order to do this, we rely on the outstanding madrigals of Claudio Monteverdi while drawing inspiration from a broad selection of literary, artistic and scientific sources. Engaged by the actors-musicians, attendants will live an all-encompassing experience in which the traditional boundary between auditorium and stage will disappear.

The Music

Between his fifth and his eighth book of madrigals (1603-1638), Claudio Monteverdi developed one of the most original languages in music history to represent and communicate emotions. By consciously innovating on the polyphonic madrigal, the composer reached a climax in the lyrical tradition of setting verses that express pain prompted by distance, rejection, longing and unrequited love. Particularly relevant to this project, the repertoire invites us to reflect on pain's reciprocally personal and social nature. Whereas in polyphonic madrigals the solitary lament of a single lover is typically embodied in multiple voices, the lyrics mingle all kinds of symbolic, psychological and emotional suffering with physical symptomatology. A highly experimental and original language of pain, both musical and poetical, characterizes these madrigals. Helped by outstanding poets such as Torquato Tasso and Battista Guarini, Monteverdi manages to create specific emotional microcosms that, put together, offer a kaleidoscopic approach to pain.

The Sources

The dramaturgy of this project is built upon snippets and re-workings of recent philosophical and scientific texts. Among the authors that inspired us are Byung Chul Han (*The Palliative Society*, 2021), Rita Segato (*Contrapedagogías de la crueldad*, 2018), Suely Rolnik (*Esferas da Insurreição*, 2018) Daniel Heller-Roazen (*Il tatto interno*, 2013), Barbara Rosenwein (*Generations of Feeling*, 2015), Giacomo Rizzolatti (*Mirrors in the Brain*, 2006). Imagery for actions, gestures and interactions between artists is drawn from the most varied repertoires and artistic fields that deal with our topic: from historical acting treatises to Japanese Butoh dance and from Renaissance sculptural masterpieces (Niccolò dell'Arca, *Compianto sul Cristo morto*) to 20th- and 21st-century novels (Carlo Emilio Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, 1941; Valeria Luiselli, *The Story of my Teeth*, 2013).

Ensemble & Collaborations

The Language of Pain is the third creation of dramaturg Jeffrey Döring and musician Andrés Locatelli, and the first official collaboration between ensemble Teatro dei Cervelli (Basel) and the company Goldstaub e.V (Stuttgart). It will be premiered on Nov 23rd, 2023 at the Freunde Alter Musik festival (Basel, Switzerland).

Theatro dei Cervelli

Lisa Ströckens, Esther Labourdette (sopranos)

Jacopo Facchini (alto and composer)

Carlos Negrín López (tenor)

Marco Saccardin (bass and theorbo)

Margherita Pupulin, Jaume Guri Batlle (violins)

Lina Manrique (viola da gamba)

Ryoko Katayama (organ, cembalo and baroque dance)

Leon Jänicke (theorbo and guitar)

Jeffrey Döring (dramaturg)

Andrés Locatelli (musical director)



Jeffrey Döring is a German director, author and producer of installation musical theatre projects. His works are characterised by installations as stages (called space stage), the integration of digital media (sound design and motion design/ projection) and non-linear storytelling, as well as documentary, biographic texts.

He is founder and chairman of Goldstaub, a theatre group based in Stuttgart that consists of media, stage and costume designers. With Goldstaub he realised the opera for deaf people *Rat Krespel*, the biographic music project *Brennender Schnee* about Hypersensitivity, *Wankelmut der Herzen* (based on madrigals by Claudio Monteverdi) about sexual diversity, and the opera film *Tränen der Daphne* about the life and intelligence of plants.

For his works he was awarded the Marie-Zimmermann fellowship 2017, the Denkzeit fellowship 2020, #takecare 2020, Reload Fellowship by Kulturstiftung des Bundes 2020, and the working grant of the City of Leipzig (2021), as well as the State of Saxony's grant for his artistic research of the life of plants. Jeffrey is based in Leipzig, Germany.



Andrés Locatelli is an Italian-Argentinean musician and musicologist based in Switzerland. As a performer, he has collaborated with some of the most celebrated early music orchestras and ensembles across Europe: Il Pomo d'oro (Francesco Corti), Les Musiciens du Louvre (Marc Minkowski), La Venexiana (Claudio Cavina), Musica Temprana (Adrián van der Spoel), Holland Baroque (Judith Steenbrink), Concerto Italiano (Rinaldo Alessandrini), La Chimera (Eduardo Egüez), among others. With these ensembles he has recorded for labels Pentatone, Naïve and Cobra Records.

In the field of musicology, Andrés's interests span from the Late Middle Ages (Ars Nova and Ars Subtilior) to the Baroque Era (Italian Seicento, Handel cantatas), with a strong attention to the dialogue between different disciplines. Andrés's musicological research has been funded by the University of Pavia, the City of Cremona and the Giorgio Cini Foundation of Venice. He was VSRC at Princeton University in 2019. As conductor and musical director, Andrés is particularly interested in sacred and secular polyphonic music of the Renaissance and Baroque eras, 17th-century opera, and experimental interdisciplinary projects based

on early music. In 2016, he conducted the European premiere of Francesco Cavalli's opera "Veremonda" with Concerto Köln (Schwetzinger Festspiele/Staatstheater Mainz). Since 2019 he collaborates with dramaturg Jeffrey Döring (Leipzig) in music/theater creations such as "Wankelmut der Herzen" (Stuttgart, Landesmuseum, 2019) and the opera-film "Tränen der Daphne" (Stuttgart, 2021). He has recently directed "Il Trionfo del Tempo oder die Vermessung der Schönheit" with stage director Anna-Sophie Mahler and Ensemble Il Profondo (Luzerner Theater, 2021-22). In 2018, he created the vocal-instrumental ensemble Teatro dei Cervelli, dedicated to the rediscovery of marginalised repertoires of the 17th century.



Favola in Musica

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