

BEGIN / THE MIRROR

BEGIJN / SIMPLE SOULS

BEGUINE / THE LESBIANS

BEGOUINE / SEX

BEGUINE / NOT-ALL

BEGIJN / THE CHASM

BEGIN / NON

Bryana Fritz
Stefa Govaart
Chloe Chignell

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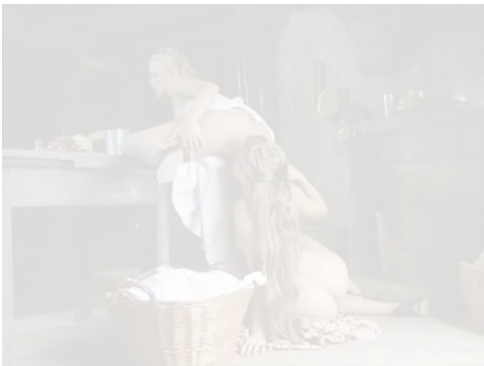
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Marguerite Porete

Le Miroir des simples âmes anéanties

*Traduit de l'ancien français
par Claude Louis-Combet*

XIII^e siècle

Texte prése
P
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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

“And I am so changed that I have therein lost my name for the sake of loving, I who can love so little; and I am changed into that which I love more than myself, that is, into Love, for I love nothing but Love.”

Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of the Simple Souls Who Are Annihilated and Remain Only in Will and Desire of Love*



BEGIN / The Mirror focuses on the history of Medieval beguine communities, a radical group of lay religious women who were living together and practicing spirituality in urban centers throughout the Low Countries starting in the 12th century. The project will take the form of a dance performance, publication, and workshop exploring topics such as matrimonial heritage, performance as preservation, the tenets of medieval mysticism, the spiritual practice of radical love, political lesbianism, annihilation and resurrection, collective living, and redemption.

We aim to work on said topics by taking on *The Mirror of Simple Souls* by the beguine Marguerite Porete (1250-1310) in which the soul passes through seven stages of love in order to achieve a total annihilation of the soul and undifferentiated union with God. In the performance, Porete's structure will function as a template to approach the embodied nature of radical feminist thinking from care practices to lesbian sex to the mutability of women via trans politics.

Beyond the performance, **BEGIN / The Mirror** will work with other beguine fanatics (scholars, translators, architecture historians, and writers) to make a publication and propose a workshop for University students in beguine cities to study this history and its inscription within social fabric today.

PERFORMANCE

BEGIN / The Mirror* will focus on an important book of beguine mysticism written by Marguerite Porete (1250-1310) entitled *Le Miroir des âmes simples anéanties et qui seulement demeurent en vouloir et désir d'amour*. Her theological treatise, written in the vernacular, proposed the possibility of immediate contact with God by passing through seven stages of love to achieve a total annihilation of the soul. It is written as an allegory in the courtly love tradition, a conversation between the characters Love, Soul, Reason, and other minor characters such as Graciousness, Farnearness, Holy Church the Less, Holy Spirit, amongst others. At the time that it was written, church authorities denounced it as full of errors and heresies. The book was subsequently condemned in Cambrai, then ordered to be burned in Valenciennes, and finally, Marguerite herself was burned to death at the stake in Paris.

*this performance has seven titles: *BEGIN / The Mirror*, *BEGIJN / Simple Souls*, *BEGUINE / The Lesbians*, *BEGUINE / Sex*, *BEGUINE / Not-All*, *BEGIJN / The Chasm*, *BEGIN / Non*
For the sake of brevity we use *Begin / The Mirror* throughout this dossier.

Or, Porete's story teaches us that the history of radical women's thinking is marked by erasure. The fate of a woman going against the grain is dispossession, as Porete's brutal immolation shows. But her creation, her writing and ideas, despite their condemnation and attempt at destruction, have survived. In them, we don't find a progressive narrative toward possession, ownership or property, but precisely the opposite: *The Mirror of Simple Souls* is a story about annihilation. This paradox interests us: can we implement our bodies towards annihilation, not fulfillment? Can dance reside in the negative space of annihilation? We take on the negativity of the dispossession of the feminized body to see if dance can figure the body as diffuse, not atomized (individualized/self-possessed). We want to redeem the dispossession of the self. Unencumbered with self, Marguerite's

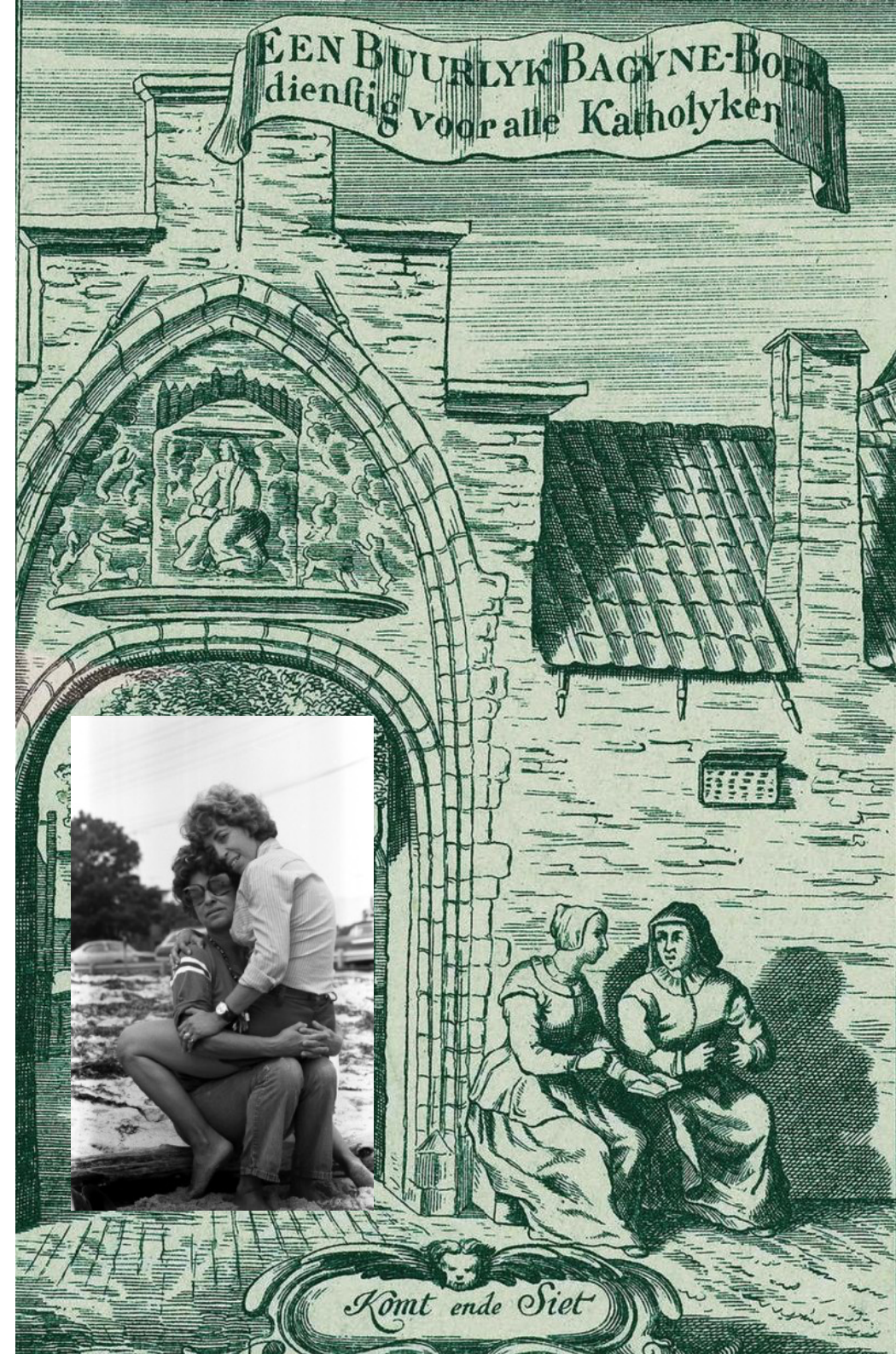
figure of Love "nourishes and sustains those who pledge faithful loyalty to her, for she is satisfying and deep and a richly flowing sea."

Together, we will use this radical and historically controversial book as our script and guide into the grammar of beguine mysticism, always adorned by the radicality of love, which Kay Gabriel describes as "a mutual, indeterminable capacity for transformation...an invitation to be changed and drowned". Projecting onto it lesbiansim and other political agendas with sexual undercurrents we consider the book in light of what Adrienne Rich has called "the lesbian continuum", despite the fact that Marguerite Porete's focus on a female embodiment of love may not have had erotic overtones. The beguines were, after all, groups of lay women who deliberately gave up men to work and live together with women only. Deciding against the interference and obstruction of men, it is our bet that the beguines acted on their desire. Thus, the performance investigates a particular strand of radical women's history in order to ask political questions of desire, sex, and solidarity between women and feminized people at large.

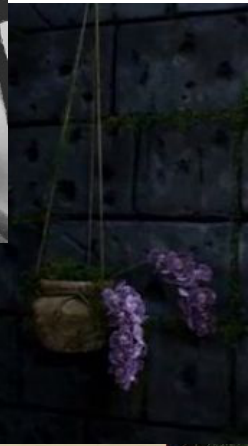
With what manner of body do women live together? Can you get aroused as a stance of solidarity among women? Can radical lesbianism interrogate the grounds of desire? What does this do to a body? And what are the ways of structuring togetherness? How do we want to reinterpret these radical agendas which cannot hold today against new frameworks of identity and selfhood? How do we learn from Marguerite Porete's annihilation?

As we are starting from a rather theoretical framework, which proposes no directly applicable forms, images or aesthetics, we attach to methodologies to structure our work in the studio. We plan to work on care practices in the morning to prepare the body physically, practicing touch, receptivity and the gravitational pull of the earthly body. We then devote the remainder of the rehearsal day to translating the seven stages of love from the book into radical choreographic procedures that aim to divert the affectively charged body.

We work towards the seventh stage of love which cannot be described, and will only be known when the soul has left the body, directing our dancing towards the unrepresentable limitlessness of love. Though we are working into the ascending states of love and annihilation, our goal is not to rid ourselves of choreographed dance or body. We negotiate this paradox by placing our belief in a “non-editing” methodology: that is, once materials are constructed they cannot be altered, or can only be altered by building after them. By implementing this radical constraint, we are both trying to track the evolution of our relationship to the material and understand dramaturgy as redemption. With this energetic push-forward, we steer away from our own judgements and external disciplinary demands which produces a process that can only be described as “a learning to love”.



baghinē
doet schone my
och vnmme ihesus
Sus lange bebbe
y erneret myt der
Dar to hebbe ik
nuttet vñ ghewra
lñ myt klenen soz
yn leuēt hen ghe
t Do myne vrun
nicht kondē ryke
Do maketē sevā
nē begynē dzatē
heft my nu in des
ate so ghesterket.
ok d werltē staet
hebbe ghemer



THE SEVEN STAGES OF LOVE

1. The soul is to love
her neighbour as herself - a simple
And through this, the soul is touched by grace

with all her heart and
labor that could infinitely occupy her.
and stripped of her capacity to do any wrong.

2. One is not a lover if she refrains herself from accomplishing all that she knows pleases her beloved. The soul must now abandon herself in the mortification of nature - despise riches, delights, and honours. This soul should not fear loss of possessions, peoples words, the weakness of her body, for her beloved does not fear them.

3. What is most prized in love is to offer what one loves most, and so she must enlarge the place where love wants to be. In this stage, the soul can access the intellect of her love. She places her love in her works of goodness and tries to submit to the will of another. She must attempt to destroy her own will, to put the will to death. And yet, in this stage, the soul is still willing with her own will.

4. The soul is now drawn up into the heights of love. She is consumed in the ecstasy of it and is left entirely impenetrable. She cannot receive touch of any kind, except the pure delight of love. The great brightness of love has totally dazzled her sight and she can see nothing beyond it. And when she is deceived by god in thinking there is no better gift, divine love carries her higher, more outside herself.

5. The soul falls from this love into nothingness, and yet she needs this nothingness, for without it, she cannot be all. The soul delicately is to remove herself from her will and the will (no longer hers) is separated from the soul and dissolves, giving itself over without retaining anything of its own. Divine goodness replaces her will with free will - it is poured into the soul by light. The soul now finds herself, without finding and without bottom. The soul sees herself, without seeing. Now she is all, and so she is nothing.

6. The soul no longer sees herself. She has fallen into an abyss of humility and has become transparent. When god sees her, he sees himself made of himself and can therefore appropriate nothing from her.

body.
left the

The seventh stage cannot be described, and it will be known only when the soul has

COSTUMES, LIGHTS, SOUND

As the beguines were active workers in the fabric industry, we've decided to include the making of the **COSTUMES** as part of the work process. We are developing a series of patterns based on medieval garments in order to create a collection of unique pieces that can be put on, taken off, and layered throughout the duration of the performance. Over the length of the seven stages, the contours of the body will transform by addition and subtraction of the fabrics and knits.

We will be using hand-crochet techniques, sewing, and embroidery. Both crochet and embroidery, in particular, are extremely laborious and time-consuming techniques, the hours of stitch after stitch serve as a space of reflection and communion which spills outside of the studio hours and the dancing body.

For **LIGHTS** we are working with artist and light designer Alice Panziera.

After a first technical residency of research at Espace Pasolini in Valenciennes, we are exploring the effects of non-direct light. Following Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls* which uses Negative Theology or the mystical language of unsaying, we imagine an asymmetrical space of local symmetries, where lights do not point at bodies but are directed toward other lights. Can one light cancel out another light? In turn, the light on stage is excess, from which the body emerges.

The **SOUND** will be an very important part of the performance. According to the seven stages of love, we will work with seven different dj's, composers, and music artists to make original tracks for each ascending stage. We plan to reach out to Ha Kyoon, Corin, Stanislav Iordenav, Stina Force, Golin, Juliana Huxtable, Franky Gogo, Molly Nilsson, Diana Duta, among others.

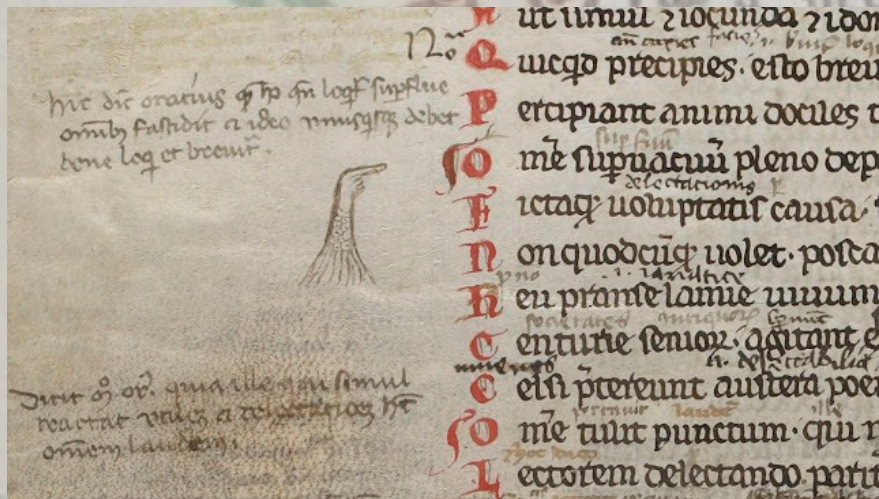


PUBLICATION

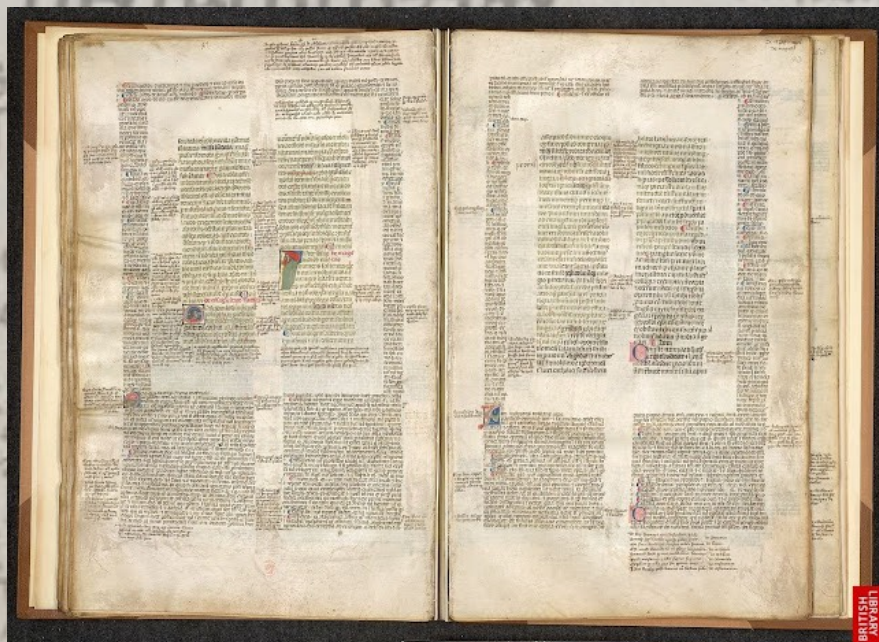
Following the creation of the performance, will be the publishing of a book. The aim is to bring together current scholarly perspectives on the beguines and to address the myriad of contemporary concerns that their modes of living suggest - collective housing, womanhood, lesbianism, religious practice. We are interested in firstly presenting a historical survey of the movement in dialogue with Beguine scholars (Caroline Walker Bynum, Patricia Dailey, Walter Simons). In addition, we would commission additional textual material in the form of fictional stories, manifestos for collective living, feminist legal scholarship, sermon writing as a genre of literature, as well as a text on the emergence of medieval information technology. We will approach Tanya Stabler Miller (history), Clovis Maillet (trans identity during the middle ages), Kate Briggs (fiction), Goda Palekaite (personal research) Assia Turquier-Zauberman (negative theology), Susan Emanuel (translator of *La Nuit des Béguines* by Aline Kiner) and Apolline Vranken (from *L'architecture qui dégenre*).

Alongside exploring beguine history and its contemporary resonance, it would be important to address the architectural importance of the beguinage and the ways that it shaped collective living. This would take the form of axonometric architectural ranging from historically rigorous to speculative fictions according politics of remembrance and/or neglect across the Netherlands, Belgium, Northern France, and Western Germany. Architecturally speaking, we are confronting an incomplete and mixed heritage of the beguinage - variously preserved, reconstructed, built over, or even entirely neglected. The desire would be to find a mode of architectural drawing that could accompany the beguinage's fate. Such drawings would not necessarily try to reconstruct the architecture of the beguinage but rather build in a kind of desirous pseudo-historical rendering of the architecture, which would include its historical and present forms.

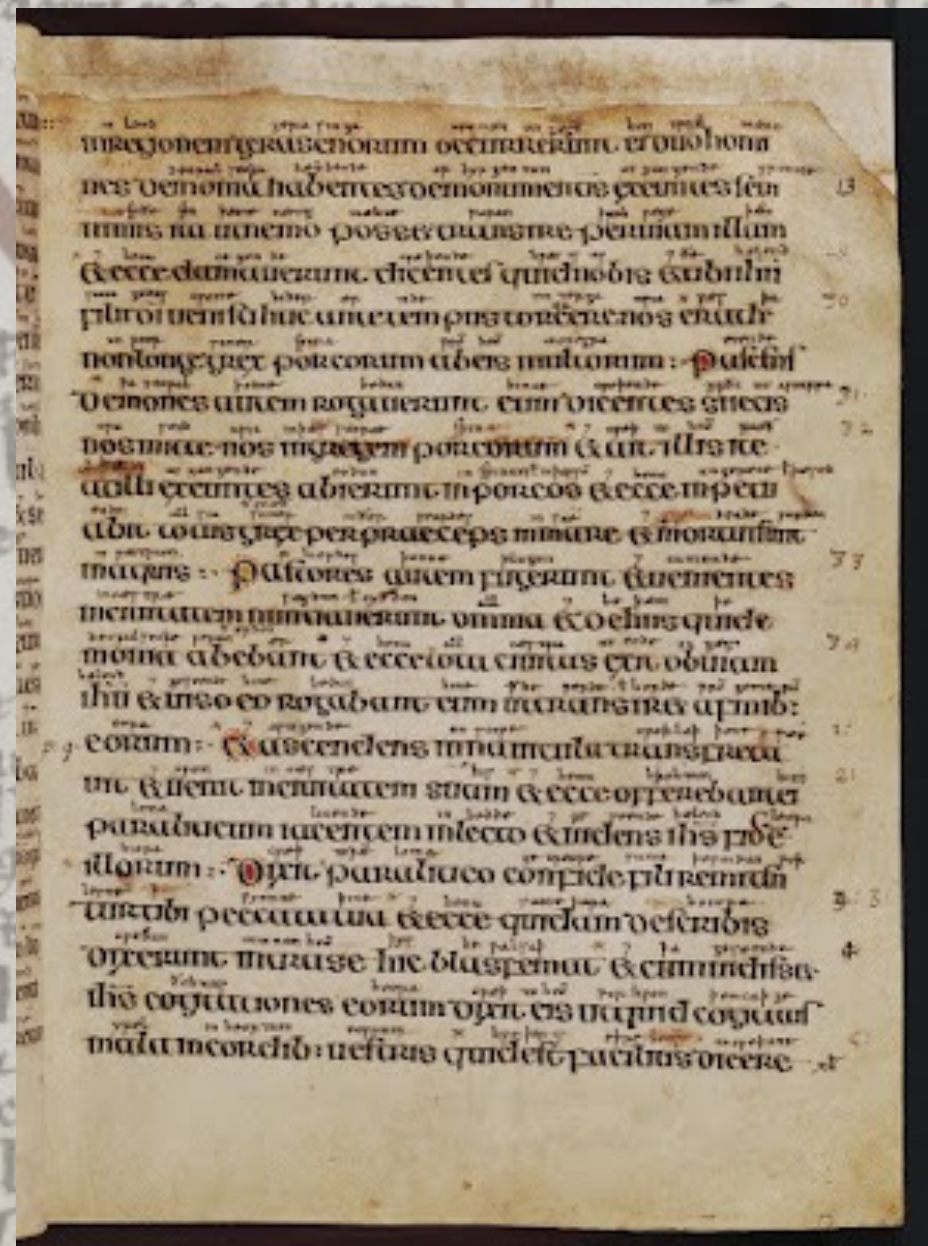
As this publication will include a multitude of voices coming from three languages (English, French, and Flemish), we want to question our relationship to translation and accessibility. Rather than smoothing it over and translating everything into English, or taking the translate everything into three languages approach, we would opt for not translating the commissioned texts and instead using medieval strategies to give readers access across language groups. We are interested to experiment with medieval manuscript layout. Within this history there are numerous strategies for formalizing the way editing, amendments, and multiple voices are made visible. Marginalia, and the wild distributions of text material across the page, are recurrent features in medieval literature. For example, we could use interlinear glossing which is a Medieval manuscript convention where scribes would leave extra space between the Latin lines to insert explanations in the vernacular for readers that were not fluent in reading Latin. Or, we could borrow from Medieval law books where only the upper left hand and upper right hand of the page are filled with laws and the rest of the page is left blank for the possibility of amendments. As such, the graphic design of the publication will be given special attention.



Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Latin 7980, detail of fol. 5v.



London, British Library MS Arundel 481, fols. 42v-43r



Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Auct. D. 2. 19, fol. 13r

WORKSHOP

Following the performance, we would like to create a workshop about the beguines for university which would bring together historical investigation, literary studies, movement practice, and question the role of performance as a strategy of preservation. These workshops would take place in both Valenciennes and Kortrijk, two beguine cities across the border from one another which have in turn been subject to two very different measures of preservation. In Valenciennes, recent efforts are being made by the tourist center (in lieu of having no formal support for preservation) towards installing public signs to inform passersby about the former beguinage. In Kortrijk, the beguinage is classified as UNESCO World Heritage since 1998 and opens its doors for visitors who wish to know more about its history.

Modelling our working process off of central beguine values, the combination of both active and contemplative practice, we aim to structure equal time for contemplative work (i.e. historical investigation, studying Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, discussing the tenants of negative theology, etc) and active work (i.e. sharing somatic practices developed within the creation of the performance, doing architectural walks through nearby beguinages, enacting certain chapters from *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, etc). All efforts together aim to articulate, in collective spirit, a dedicatory act, a manifestation of our time spent with the beguines, or a performance of our inheritance. This can take any form and will be developed with the students.



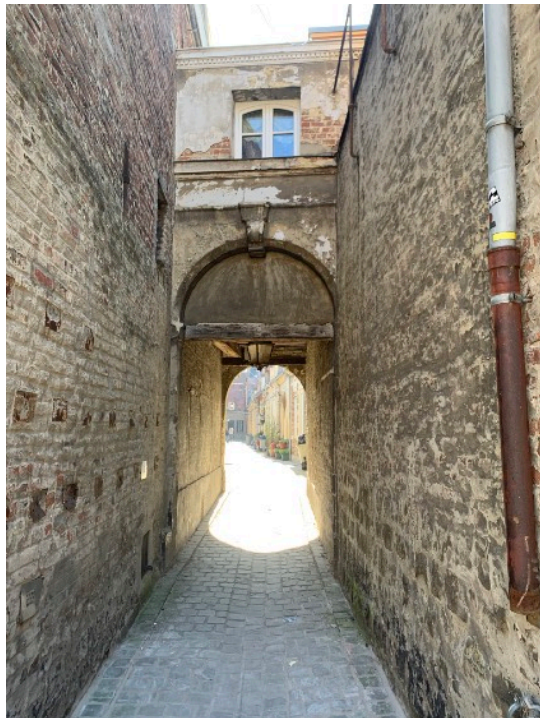
HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

This project began with a subvention from the French Ministry of Culture in framework of Mondes Nouveaux (programme de relance post COVID) which we used through 2022-2023 for historical and site-specific research, as well as first investigations in the studio for both light and movement. The aim was to follow the tragic trajectory of Marguerite Porete's book: Cambrai where it was condemned, Valenciennes where it was burned, and Paris where she herself was burned.

In Cambrai, we visited Le Béguinage Saint-Vaast which was founded in 1353. Though the facades and roofs have been classified as historic monuments on August 2, 1949, the rest of the structure was sold to real estate developers and was transformed into private housing. Luckily we were able to discretely enter the courtyard on cleaning day when the door was propped open. During this residency we worked at Eclipse, a centre d'animation, directed by Nicolas le Flohic. It was important for us to find ways of sharing and opening our process and research with a socially engaged space, which beyond offering its first artist residency ever, usually provides help and resources to lower-income families, as well as courses, sports, and places to safely hang out for kids.



Courtyard of Le Béguinage Saint-Vaast, Cambrai



Entrance to Le Béguinage de Valenciennes

In Valenciennes, we visited Le Béguinage de Valenciennes which was built in 1239 as a hospital and then subsequently entrusted to the beguines. Much of the original architecture was demolished during the Revolution now only parts remain. Like Cambrai, it is presently used as private housing. While in Valenciennes we were working at Espace Pasolini, Nathalie Le Corre, the director, also kindly put us in contact with scholars and teachers at the Université de Valenciennes as well as an employee and beguine enthusiast working at the Valenciennes Tourist Center. Together with these three different institutions we are setting up a longer trajectory of working together starting with the premiere of the performance at Espace Pasolini as part of NEXT Festival in November 2024, a workshop with students at the university in early 2025, and finally putting together a publication which would be released mid-2025.

Previous garden of the Ancien Grand Béguinage de Paris



For our final residency, we went to Paris to visit the Ancien Grand Béguinage de Paris which was founded around 1230 and is located in present-day Le Marais. The structure was built along the east side of l'Enceinte de Philippe-Auguste, but only a portion of this wall remains. At the place of the béguinage now sits the Lycée Charlemagne. While visit this site we were simultaneously working at La Briqueterie, who will also be a future support and residency location for the work. In Paris, the aim is to set up performances in 2025 on-site at the béguinage on the adjacent enormous sports court (Terrain de sport des jardins Saint-Paul). According to medieval scholar, Tanya Stabler Miller, at the time of the beguines this land was outside the city wall but it hosted a garden which the beguines would visit to cultivate medicinal plants.

Over the length of these residencies, our aim was to closely read and study the entire book of *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, to begin establishing modes of working collectively, to generate movement and care practices, and to spend time with each site researching their history. This first research period, thanks to the funding of Mondes Nouveaux, has created the grounds from which we begin working on the performance.



Rue du Béguinage, Valenciennes



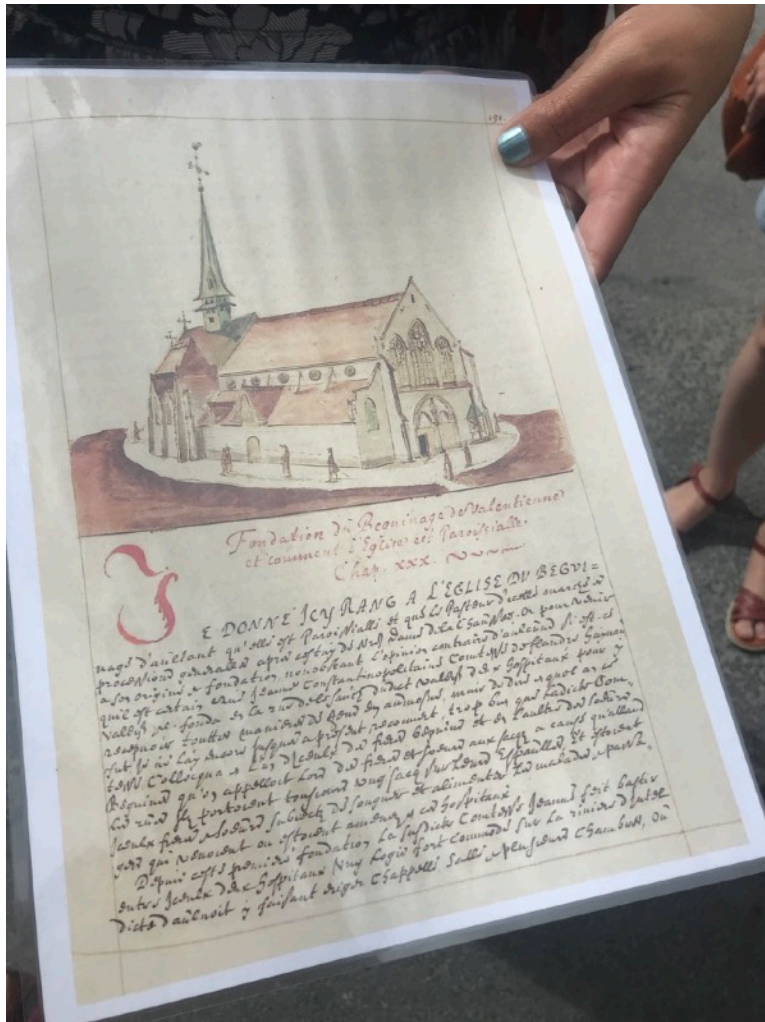
Le Béguinage Saint-Vaast, Cambrai



Historical tour with the Valenciennes Tourist Center

HISTORY OF THE BEGUINES

Note: As this history is little known, we will rather extensively elaborate it here. Though it might mean pushing hard over the abbreviated character count of a typical dossier, it feels like an important risk to take.



Drawing of the church of Le Béguinage de Valenciennes

In the 12th century, groups of spiritual lay women were gathering together in urban centers throughout the Low Countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, northern France and eastern Germany) to live together in collective housing, called beguinages, and practice religious life outside the jurisdiction of the church. The beguines wrote and published books in the vernacular (old French instead of Latin), originated certain strains of mystical thinking, explored a mode of practicing religion that would be suitable for urban life, and generated financial accessibility and independence for women. In times when women had little to no independence, the beguines enabled an emancipatory potential to live and generate narratives that strayed from hegemonic strictures and structures.

Unlike other forms of monastic religious expression present at the time, which often emphasised a life of enclosure, the taking of formal vows of chastity and withdrawal from the temptations of the outside world, the beguines claimed instead to practice their faith by living in the world, in communion, and combining active and contemplative service. It brought together women from a wide range of economic positions - from the very rich to the very poor - and became an attractive lifestyle for women who wanted neither to marry nor to surrender their lives to monastic enclosure. On entering the beguinage, which was considered a "moderate enclosure", women were invited to take *informal* vows of chastity (meaning that at any time, if they wished, they could leave the beguinage to marry or do whatever they wished), and they were also allowed to keep any property they might own. Many of the women were working in the silk industry - running businesses, employing each other, paying taxes, etc, - finding their own means of supporting themselves and their community. Due to the legal loopholes at the time, a woman could pass on her property to another woman outside her family. We can see from historical tax records that

that there is a trickle of wealth from one beguine to another and another. At the beguinage, these women also set up and ran hospitals, provided education for women and children to learn to read and write in the vernacular, delivered sermons to one another and developed new and radical strands of pseudo-religious, mystical thought.

Not so long ago, on April 14, 2013, the world's last beguine, Marcella Pattijn is said to have passed away in the Belgian town of Kortrijk at the age of 92. So, in October 2023, we are effectively living without a single beguine in the world. And while the beguinages of Belgium and the Netherlands have been largely preserved (13 of them have even been listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites), the beguinages of France have either been destroyed, are left standing but unpreserved, or have been bought and transformed into private property by investors. Many of these historical sites in France are not even signposted, significantly the largest beguinage which hosted up to 400 women located in the center of Paris. In many ways, they still retain the status that they initially had when first formed - never sanctioned, never saved.



Marcella Pattijn

BIOGRAPHIES

Bryana Fritz (b.1989) is a choreographer, dancer, and writer based in Brussels. Her work situates itself at the intersection between literature and performance, and often does so in duet with the user interface of OS X. Her work is fed by a continued interest in medieval history, fanfiction, media studies, theology, and histories of illiteracy. Currently she is working on a long-term research and performance project entitled *Submission Submission*. A feminist hagiographic codex which seeks to portrait the subversive strategies of Medieval women saints. In 2022, Fritz collaborated with Thibault Lac on *Knight-Night*, a performance that evokes the iconic figure Don Quixote questing for love under the flags of fiction and reality. Since 2016, she has been collaborating with Henry Andersen under the moniker Slow Reading Club, a semi-fictional reading group that deals in constructed situations for collective reading.

Fritz studied at the University of Minnesota (USA), Folkwang Universität der Künste (DE), and graduated from the P.A.R.T.S. (BE) training and research program in 2014. She has since worked as a dancer and performer for Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (*Drumming* and *Work Travail Arbeit* at WIELS), Xavier Le Roy (*Retrospective* at MoMA PS1), Boris Charmatz (*10,000 Gestes*), and Michiel Vandeveld (*Andrade* and *Ends of Worlds*), amongst others. As a writer, she has published essays in *The Floor is Uneven. Does It Slope?* (ed. by Laura Herman & Henry Andersen), *En Plein Air: Ethnologies of the Digital* (ed. by P. Karambeigi, A. Ostertag, T. Rossol, P. Schwarzer, L. Stolz), *Extra Extra* magazine, *Etcetera* magazine, a.o.

Chloe Chignell (b.1993) is an artist based in Brussels working across text, choreography and publishing. Her work focuses on language within a choreographic frame; she invests in writing as a body building practice, examining the ways in which language makes us up. Chloe graduated from a pass (BE, 2020) and from the research cycle at P.A.R.T.S (BE, 2018). Since 2019 Chloe co-runs *rile** a bookshop and

project space for publication and performance with Sven Dehens. Her work has been presented by: Batard Festival (BE, 2019) Saal Biennale (ES 2021), Moving Words Festival (NO 2021), QL2 (AU 2022), KAAP (BE 2022), Littérature etc. (FR 2022), Dancehouse (AU 2016-8), The Kier Choreographic Award (AU 2018) Kottinspektionen (SE 2019) and Venice Biennale of Dance (IT 2017) among other venues in Europe and Australia. As a dancer she has worked with choreographers across Europe including: James Bachelor, Bryana Fritz, Ingrid Berger Myhre, Adriano Wilfert Jensen, Phoebe Berglund, Anna Gaiotti,

Clara Amaral, Gry Tingskog and Angela Goh. In 2020 She published her first book *The Complete Text Would Be Insufferable* with *uhbooks* edited by Will Holder. Her writing has been published in: *misted.cc* an online temporary reading space (NL), *Choreography Journal* (NO), *Le Chauffage* (BE), *RealTime* (AU), *This Container Magazine* (SE/BE), ...and then the doors open again (BE/NL) and *Engagement Arts Zine* (BE). She currently teaches as part of the BA and MA dance programs at ISAC (BE) and P.A.R.T.S. (BE). www.chloechignell.com

CALENDAR:

April 15-27, 2024 : PAF, St-Erme-Outre-et-Ramecourt

June 3-16, 2024 : Pavillion ADC, Geneve

July 1-7, 2024: Kunstencentrum BUDA, Kortrijk

August 19-24, 2024: Espace Pasolini, Valenciennes

September 2 - 14, 2024 : La Briqueterie CDCN du Val-de-Marne, Virtry-sur-Seine

October 21 - 25, 2024: Espace Pasolini, Valenciennes

October 28 - November 9, 2024:

Nov 11 - 23, 2024: Espace Pasolini, Valenciennes (to be confirmed)

End of November: Premiere in the context of NEXT Festival at Espace Pasolini/BUDA Kunstencentrum (to be confirmed)

Early 2025: workshop at the University of Valenciennes in collaboration with Espace Pasolini / workshop in Kortrijk in collaboration with BUDA Kunstencentrum and the University

Mid-2025: release of publication