

Band 7:

Studies on Squats

By the artist, dancer, and writer **Yon Natalie Mik**.

This evocative book uses the multifaceted posture of the “Asian Squat” as a lens to examine broader concepts of migration, illness, and resilience. In *Studies on Squats*, the body—in its most vulnerable and potent states—becomes a speculative site for reclaiming agency through new forms of protest that draw from ancestral strength, humor, and eroticism. This posture, rich with cultural resonance, provides an entry point to imagine ways in which the body can engage in acts of defiance against systems of oppression.

Studies on Squats was realized within the context of *Performance & co-teaching*, a cooperation fellowship between the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design and Akademie Schloss Solitude, and was co-published with Archive Books. It is the fifth book of *Die Frau mit 50 Füßen* series, edited by Cristina Gómez Barrio and Wolfgang Mayer (Discoteca Flaming Star), focusing on both collective and individual artistic practices relevant to the Department of Fine Arts / M.F.A. *Body, Theory, and the Poetics of the Performative*.

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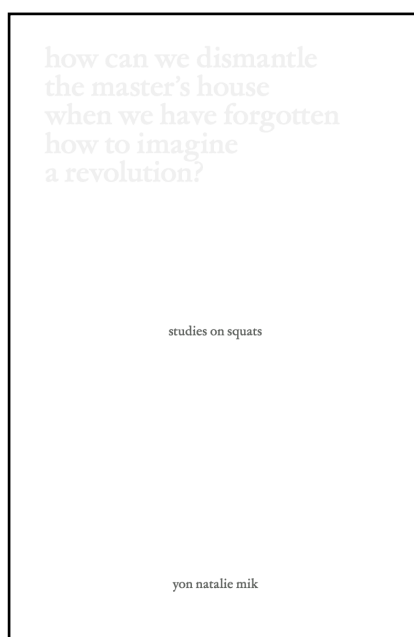
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Studies on Squats is an evocative exploration of embodied resistance and political movement that uses the multifaceted posture of the “Asian Squat” as a lens through which broader concepts of migration, illness, and resilience are examined. In *Studies on Squats*, the body—in its most vulnerable and potent states—becomes a speculative site for reclaiming agency by crafting new forms of protest that draw from ancestral strength, humor and eroticism. This posture, rich with cultural resonance, offers as an entry point to imagine ways in which the body can engage in acts of defiance against systems of oppression. *Studies on Squats* invites the audience to consider how dance and choreographic thinking can serve as tools for envisioning alternative futures, where artistry empowers those enduring systemic social injustices to transform their realities.

archive books



yon natalie mik

studies on squats

ab

how can we dismantle
the master's house
when we have forgotten
how to imagine
a revolution?

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how can we dismantle the master's house when we have forgotten how to imagine a revolution?

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dance of the oppressed
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studies on squats
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notes and
acknowledgments

danced resistance
notes on publishing movement
thank you
squat group (editorial note)

For people enduring oppressive conditions, resistance is a vital tool. But resistance by the oppressed requires artistry. When the very act of resisting oppression limits one's possibilities in life or endangers one's survival, what then is the nature of resistance? Could the threat itself mutate the possibilities of what it means to resist? Is resistance always a loud and visible disruption or could it also exist in a slow, obscure, quiet, strange, more fragile form?

Studies on Squats is a choreographic inquiry into these questions. It is a dance of the oppressed. Through the performative poetry of the "Asian Squat" (a deep, flat-footed squat commonly used for resting and daily activities in many Asian cultures), I collect memories, histories, myths and records of daily life to create an alphabet for respelling resistance. *Studies on Squats* is a blueprint for, hopefully, many other kinetic journeys that will be open to all who want to dance a revolution.

I delve into the potential of dance as
resistance.

A single movement is connected to many embodied
records of daily protests.

The repeated practice of squatting—a public dialogue between action and reflection in rehearsal—allows my body to kinetically travel to fragmented pasts and future memories of migration, illness, survival, eroticism, and ancestral connections. My squatting body becomes a site for fanning out stories on the table for you to be read. The now is dependent on the observer. Simultaneity is relative.

I squat and slowly sway from side to side. Long dissolved memories stir in the movement of my hips. Summoned like mist, they rise into the air, become heavy, rain down on me and flood my body with forgotten sounds. I sway again and again until repetition becomes music.

The memories fill every inch of my body. I use them to speculate about something urgent: a life more loving and dignified. I ask where life exists beyond the relentless demands of a capitalist world obsessed with gains. A life where care nurtures transformation and dependency builds support structures. A life where the labor of crippling creates new forms of protest open to more bodies and minds. A life where fragility becomes another letter for spelling resistance.

I want to celebrate the social choreographies of people who have always subverted power structures and reimagined resistance. I need to give hope to people, and myself, who will continue the work of resistance in the imagined future of our collective resilience.

For a long time, women have squatted to bring life into the world, as the children in the wombs, in the earliest moments of becoming, have squatted too.

The supine position came with the medicalization of childbirth in Western hospitals—not for the birthing body, but for the convenience of the male physician, whose hands took control of her.

In the imagined futures of our resistance, the birthing body rises back to the squatting position.

In the imagined futures of our resistance, birthing transcends the biological act. Everyone carries the responsibility and the potential to nurture the next generation of protesters.

In the imagined futures of our resistance, birthing is an act of repair.

The pelvis opens fully and gravity assists.

joining a protest

4,

an apparition break into view—
it came to bend the rules of sight, becoming what's hidden
in the folds of the past and right at your feet

the smell of grievances rise up to your nose
and the shiny surface of normalcy is upset

in the hesitation to look down
negotiation of visibility begin

the ghost stay close to the ground
pull down the muscle of your face
as if gravity itself has intensified

controlled time break,

enter another now

you think it's nonsense, you want to indulge
in the power, the momentum of moving high
but your back has already softened
and stronger than any drug, oxygen is entering your spine

you give in, squat, take a deep breath
feel the new blood tickling through the body
surprised how much air your lungs can hold

you sway side to side
until music make flowers grow out of your ears
flowers for those lost between
permission and prohibition

ball of energy

5,

frog squat low
body compact
legs bent decisively
muscle hum under the skin
then tighten
coiling into a ball of energy
feet press into damp soil
distributing weight evenly
knees angle out
preparing for flight
center of gravity shift downward
compressing like a spring
every joint in position
for a strong push
motion suspended
stillness vibrate
on the edge of release

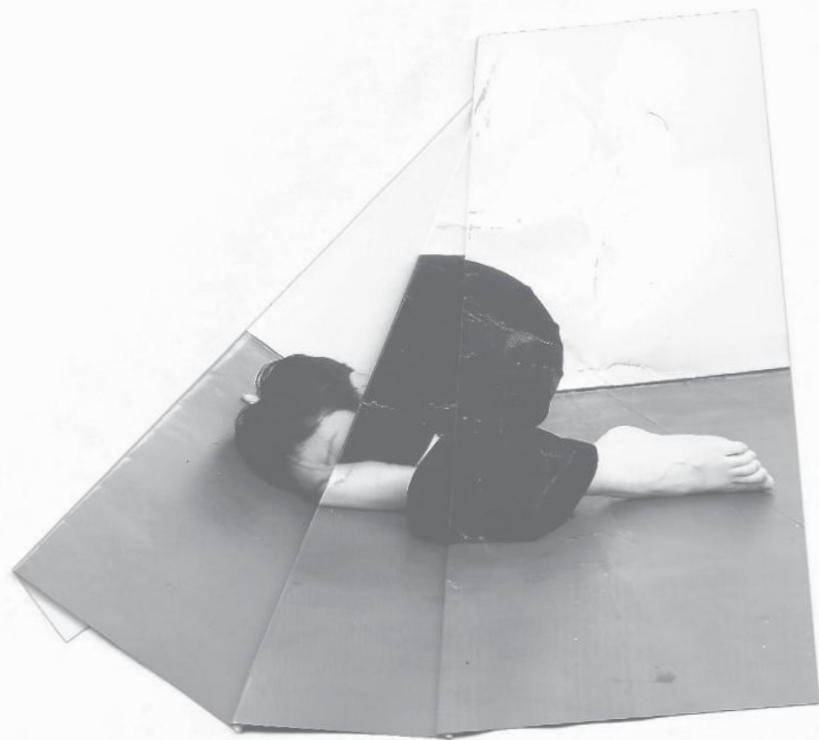
Flow, a belief in seamless fluidity, turns bodies into passive vessels for the master's imagination. A dream of constant, unbroken motion moving through uncluttered space. Relentlessly, it feeds off bodies, off her/stories, with a patriarchal grip that commodifies and sexualizes. An illusion built on violence.

In the mechanical hum of flow, displaced bodies that crossed borders in search of survival—of anything more than the ruins war and capitalism have left behind—keep moving. Never stopping. Emptied of their lives.

Flow measures the body by its capacity to produce capital, dividing the abled from the disabled. If the body can produce, it flows; if not, it's discarded. Flow, a system of control and selection. It worships the always-in-motion, always-producing body, categorizing slowness and illness as failure.

Flow allows no pause. No collision. No space for memory. No abrasive surface. No doubts. No precarity. No chance for the body to question its pace, to feel its temperature, to choose its direction, to smell its scent, to hold its weight.

Watch the bodies that are capable of disrupting the flow. Study the bodies that crip and queer the flow. Bodies that can protest the endless churn. Bodies that can refuse to be exploited as tools in the machine of flow.



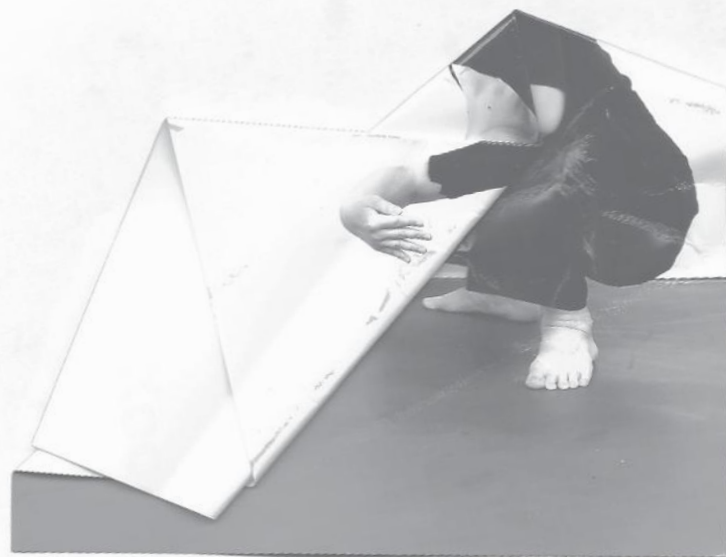
















falling into a squat
7,

i-can't-walk-anymore
words barely escape my lips
before the spine takes over
folding in protest
find me collapsing
when legs bend
drawing me down
from here, i can hear
the quiet sounds of refusal
rising from the pavement

take off your shoes
and we dig our toes into soil
let them sprout roots
and touch the water
when we sing together
who decided to paint the horizon
with a fucking single straight line

the air is growing my bones
knees giving way
eyes gliding
squatting deep
into the earth
daring the world to see
that when the body says no
it means she-can-not.
surrender in defiance
refuse to bear more
the back continues to curl
encasing the lungs
balls of my feet anchored
ready to rise

chosen ancestors
8,

i want to fall deep

with all strength freed
blind and powerless
to meet my spiritual ancestors
i was not born into

i fight my fright
what is this love
wait three seconds to open my eyes
the next morning
to face another terrible vertigo
anxiety of losing the memory of
an illusion that tells me
i'm broken
i'm dead
i cry
i cry for two years

to finally fall into your million arms

portrait of mothers I

9,

One of my earliest childhood memories is of umma driving my brother and me with her to the nursing home where she worked night shifts. She was a single mother of two, a nurse by night and a janitor by day. The small upper part of the car window was always left slightly open on those drives. Cold air snuck in and pinched my face. The drive lasted around thirty minutes. I was cold, but I didn't say anything because we knew that she kept the window open to stay awake while driving. Even at that age, I sensed there was something more unforgiving than the cold that she was living through.

portrait of mothers II

10,

Umma returned home. Her new Korean apartment has a traditional floor heating system, *ondol*, but she can't use it because she can no longer squat, rest, or sleep on the floor like she used to when she left home. Seeing her high bed, with its double soft mattress, and the giant couch occupying half of her living room makes me laugh, then cry. Fifty years of life in Germany and umma's body experienced distortion. Her body is evidence of the many dehumanizing lives she endured, the remorseless intolerance of cultural clashes, and her persistence to survive in a place that deformed her. She unlearned the Asian squat to hold on to life.

Centuries ago, somewhere in old Asia, foreign traders came, eager to sell their wares. Their arrival was never really about trading goods. It was about gaining control—an invisible hand reaching for the land. Aware of this shifting power, people began to build elaborate high chairs from cherry trees so they could sit with the foreigners at the same table and negotiate with them at eye level. The negotiations were successful. Once the chairs were built, the tables rose higher and other pieces of furniture were adapted to high-seated culture. Then their garments changed, as did the architecture of their houses, the shape of their gardens, and the flowers planted in them.

while the world continues
not paying for the labor of crippling resistance

pain continues to filter through disabled bodies
transforming into knowledge
harvested from a site of resilience

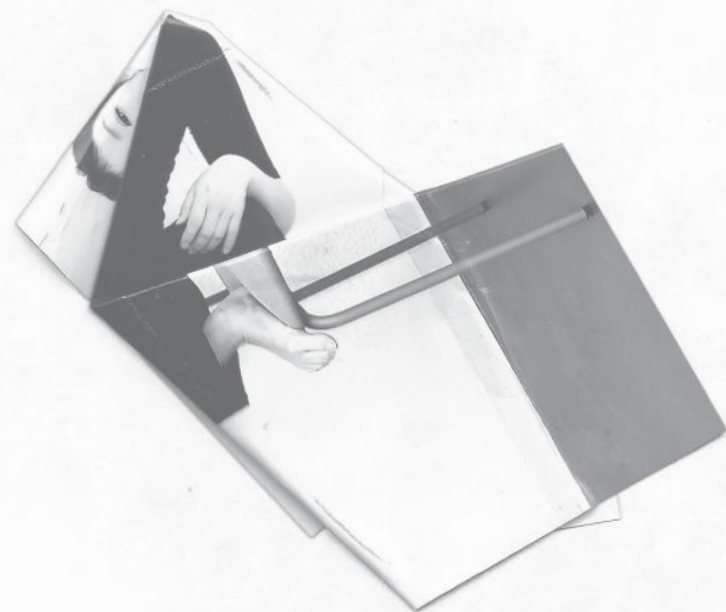
disabled bodies have always subverted resistance
redefined and mastered it

some of us take it for free, some of us throw it
away, and some of us don't see it

straight line
13,

sit up straight, don't slouch, stand tall, walk in
lean to one side, don't hunch over, straighten
get your facts straight, make sure you're on
your priorities straight, get your head straight,

a straight line, hold your head up, straighten your spine, don't
your legs, line up your priorities, be upright, do the right thing,
the right path, say it the right way, do it right, think straight, set
right your wrongs, make the right choice, straighten out your life,
keep everything in line.



















second-generation immigrant
14,

the impossibility of one person
leads to the urgency of another
leads to the anger, the forgiving, the yearning of a dream

on the day of my 18th birthday
you gave me a ring that you had bought for yourself
to adorn your hand
and to go on a date to that nice café
with fresh cut flowers on small round tables
covered with ironed white table cloths

i keep the ring inside a small porcelain dish with a lid
that i carefully lift to see inside
like a ritual, i perform this act here and then
as a reminder how small gestures hold the weight
of stories untold and choices made

the non-language of one person
teaches a dance to another
today my scores move memories from one place to another
from non-language
to language
again to non-language of desire

first-generation immigrant

15,

care and survival are other names for the resistance
by the mothers who performed thousands of protests
in and outside of streets
a mother was cleaning
a mother was cooking
a mother was working three jobs
a mother was tapping our backs
so that we could leave the house to stop the flow.
the question is not if they resisted
but what doors they have opened
what protests they nurtured
and what future resistance they made possible

nine months after migration

16,

the smell of the earth
draws closer
together with an old memory
abandoned in another life
touching it brings strange relief
also discomfort
a step back to a place i thought i'd left behind
from the texture of the soil
i can tell it's not mine
my back curves under the weight of lives
i carry without knowing
souls that came before me
pressing into the lungs shaping
the bend of my back
the drop of my hips
the sound filling the space between my breaths

songs from the navel to the spine

17,

this is a protest
of the body
bearing witness
sharing risk
for the vulnerable
let's squat together!
(let's squat together!)

legs open wide
to a spider web
feet absorb with strength
the anger of the sun
hands are on the navel
the body's first wound

this is a protest
of the body
bearing witness
sharing risk
for the deceased
let's squat together!
(let's squat together!)

smell the heat of the soil
listen to the ur-body
in armor butterfly
we endure the next fight
together sweat out the tears
our ancestors have cried

this is a protest
of the body.
bearing witness
sharing risk
for the invisible
let's squat together!
(let's squat together!)

bend the straight line
and arc the stiff spine
do you feel the oxygen move
from the navel to the spine?
filling up our cells with life
to heal what they have done

this is a protest
of the body
bearing witness
sharing risk
for the lost
let's squat together!
(let's squat together!)

time has come to bring
the squatting body back
from forgotten place
reclaim the ancient self
kinetic recover for what
mankind has erased

cowgirl in orange room
18,

narrow sliver by the door
catching the warm sunlight
flooding in
through the sheer curtains
on the tousled bed
a woman
all skin
is squatting
making love
moving in and out
in an infinite oval form
as if she is stirring a magic soup
that is about to blop
conjuring the pulse of the next
roundup

dance outside my body

19,

I sit in the subway, folding and unfolding. The photo crinkles below my fingers, the paper stiff at first—cool and smooth. I press harder, bending it loosely, then sharply, moving the head next to my right foot. I smile because for the next fifteen minutes, from Spichernstrasse to Kottbusser Tor, I am dancing an impossible dance outside my body. With each fold, the legs soften. I slide along the creases, smoothing them, then push against them, changing the temperature—warm now. The strange body flaps around like a joyful eagle. What is the next move? The knee wants to disappear. I fold again—very slowly this time—a corner bends too far, the tension thickens, and I hear the loud crackle of the fibers. The paper fights back, but I keep going, pressing, twisting, folding. The edges scrape against my hands, rougher now. I keep bending, folding and unfolding.

















Asian Squat (3,940,900 results)
Slav Squat (3,850,050 results)
Primal Squat (2,250,000 results)
Russian Squat (2,420,870 results)
Jail Pose (2,247,100 results)
Chinese Squat (1,930,002 results)
Japanese Squat (722,000 results)
Korean Squat (589,070 results)
Vietnamese Squat (236,000 results)
Prison Pose (154,509 results)
Frog Pose (120,452 results)
Thai Squat (34,200 results)
Squat Stool (25,598 results)

turn around and fold a new perspective

Resistance, in our world, takes many forms. Some resistance perpetuates labor exploitation and class-based inequality, undermining workers' rights to fair wages and working conditions. Other resistances emerge from white supremacist movements that uphold racism and systemic violence. The banner of resistance is raised by many oppressors who claim to resist what they perceive as a threat to their privileges.

The resistance I wish to refer to is the urgency to change power imbalances, resistance that aims for survival and is directed against systems of oppression that uphold injustices such as classism, racism, and ableism. It is resistance that unravels those who maintain their dominance at the expense of marginalized groups and prevent others from accessing rights and resources.

Resistance by people enduring oppressive conditions requires artistry. Dance can breathe into resistance a space for imagination, where one can energetically transform the movements of the darkest moments into movements of strength and resilience. Throughout history, spirituality—not institutionalized religion—has served people in precarious situations as a means of sustaining well-being and political autonomy.

Dance does not divide the spiritual from the political.

Danced resistance is spiritual activism.

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What does it mean to publish a movement and how deeply is it connected to the act of dancing politically? The idea of publishing movement becomes especially relevant when we imagine forms of protest that are accessible to more bodies or that are performed outside of the body.

1. Publishing refers to the act of establishing a public space or disseminating information. The act embodies a desire to open a space that belongs to everyone—shared and accessible to all.

2. Movement refers to the idea of changing place or causing change. Movement can be understood as physical motion and as a shift in thought, space, and power.

3. Publishing movement describes the act of making accessible a dynamism that brings forth knowledge in a collaborative process of continual change, whether at the level of the singular body or in broader society. In doing so, it becomes a form of staged protest against structures that hinder transformation.

4. Publishing movement is inherently political and aligned with activism. It brings forth transformation with the purpose of shifting the imbalances of power that reinforce systemic inequalities including but not limited to racism, classism, ableism, and sexism.

5. Dancing politically is the embodiment of the publishing of movement. It is a spiritual act that reaches beyond the personal into the collective, across space and time.

6. To publish movement we utilize at least three methods to set the dance apart from others:

I. The method of tactics. Rather than moving impulsively, we perform with careful organization. This is essential because political actions always face opposition from other actors and the landscape of protest is shaped by systems of domination. A strategic approach is required to maneuver through these challenges.

II. The method of fostering collectivity. A person dancing alone in darkness and private does not stage an effective protest as they are limited in their ability to disrupt. It is through the assembly of a collective, through the building of support structures for everyone's energy to be held and projected outward, that a protest is formed.

III. The method of staging antagonism. A temporary public space opens wherever the status quo of social structures is challenged by opposition. This antagonism is not about physical violence but about a symbolic conflict that plays out in the realm of ideas, values, and social norms. The staging of antagonism also involves blocking or obscuring capitalist flow.

7. As a performative tool, a repeated process of publishing movement through action and reflection presents a dancery rehearsal with a pedagogical dimension. It is a form of protest that can be practiced and its processual knowledge can be taught and learned.

8. We can use publishing movement as a strategy to protect ourselves against oppressive forces that distort and limit the possibilities of our lives. The artistry of publishing movement can hold space for growth and healing.

In 2013, at the California-Pacific Triennial, I saw Akio Takamori's life-sized ceramic sculptures of squatting girls for the first time, and since then, I have never viewed the squatting posture in the same way again. His work taught me the power of artistry that transformed a mundane resting posture into a gateway to stories rich with childhood mysteries, humor, and cultural imprints. It must have been then that the squatting body started haunting me, until five years later when I tested out my first performances to become that squatting girl I saw in the museum.

Studies on Squats was embraced and brought to life as a book thanks to Cristina Gómez Barrio and Wolfgang Mayer from Discoteca Flaming Star; their unwavering trust in allowing me to bring the project to the classroom in a pedagogical format has been meaningful. The lives and bodies of my three mothers, Yon Hong Soon, Yon Hong Yea, and Yon Jea Sook,

have deeply inspired both this project and its precursor, *Studies on Smiles*. I extend my heartfelt thanks: to Lilia Di Bella, one of the first to believe in this project, whose design has shaped and nurtured this book so profoundly. To Paolo Caffoni, for his editorial advice, love, and continuous encouragement that brought this book to completion. Rina Nakano's magical hands took the original photos of me squatting, which I could turn into the folded paper dances presented in this book. To Virginia Arce, whose meticulous copy-editing brought clarity to the text; and to my friends who helped proofread and shared their thoughts: Erin Gordon, Iden Sunyoung Kim, Shamoni Sarkar, Yassen Vasilev, and Xiaowen Zhu. To the spirits of fierce thinkers and dreamers: Audre Lorde and Susan Sontag, both of whom also lived with breast cancer and whose words became mantras in my darkest days, teaching me to draw strength from fragility; Gloria Anzaldúa, whose work has shown me how to use the language of the spiritual to speak politically. My thanks also go to the State Academy of Fine Arts Stuttgart and the students in the M.F.A. program Body, Theory, and the Poetics of the Performative for their support, patience, and openness. Special appreciation goes to the publisher Archive Books for including this work among their esteemed roster, and to the residency at the Akademie Schloss Solitude, whose support was crucial in developing this project. Lastly, heartfelt thanks to everyone who squatted with me during the past four years in both private and public performances of *Studies on Squats*.

All of your presence has been invaluable.

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In her work *Studies on Squats*, Yon Natalie Mik leaves us not only with a testimony of her own research and artistic practice but also with the traces and impulses arising from a search for a movement—the bodily position of the squat. For years, Yon has devoted herself to the study of the squat, also known as the “Asian squat”, through performances in public spaces, studio work with various materials such as paper, in the practice of writing, and through the act of publishing.

Her body, squatting in a museum in Los Angeles, in a courtyard in Italy, and in Germany as a daughter of a Korean migrant, surrenders itself to the concrete and contextualized investigation of broken and retained narratives of bodies. By entering, staying, sharing, and leaving the squat, Yon formulates the possibility for the migrant body to politically inhabit its role by resisting the passive state of being observed and forced to wait.

This is especially evident in public spaces, where that body moves on the threshold of *contar/no contar* (telling/not telling)—becoming a site for telling stories, giving account to what is remembered and acknowledged, while also facing all that is untold and forgotten. The body takes a stand, navigating a world that so often dictates who and what is seen, heard, and valued.

As a co-professor in the MFA program ‘Body, Theory, and Poetics of the Performative,’ as part of her cooperation fellowship ‘Performance and Co-teaching Practice’ between the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design and Akademie Schloss Solitude, Yon Natalie Mik has shared with students the process and method of how each artist can come to identify “their own squat”—a *movimiento encrucijada* (crossroads movement)—where, through the action of binding, multiple movements converge into a site of a transitional state charged with dilemma and negotiations.

In this publication, it becomes clear how the search for a *movimiento encrucijada* and the journey that this movement sets in motion constantly trembles between the somatic and the historical; that is to say, one must keep in mind “one’s own”—that which is engraved in our tissues and organs—as an expression of historical specificity, encompassing both what is recorded and what is meant to be forgotten or erased. It is in the form, and in the collective study of form, that we can come to identify and listen to its gestures.

Yon invited us to pay infinite dialogic attention to the form of our movements: to their rhythms, the interruptions, the balances, the pace of the motion, the turns, the directions, the intervals, the strength of the movement, the changes of centers of gravity, the pauses, the velocities, etc. As a group, we worked

with exchanges of observation and description, which made it possible to discern which movements had the power to continue operating in oneself and within the observer, to see what persisted and insisted. The body as a place of emergence of history and socio-political specificity is the focus of the M.F.A. ‘Body, Theory, and Poetics of the Performative,’ and the work proposed in class by Yon emphasized how this emergence and the search for this expression always happened in dialogue, through observation, and in formulation with others and through others.

Once the participants had identified their movement, these became subject matter to further delve into and shape. In the material published here, Yon shares how her performances on the studies of squats have flowed into an intimate relationship with writing and manifested in the photographic reproduction of her squatting body. The latter seems to propose a kind of new alphabet, strange and folded, that coexists with prose poems in which this trembling between the somatic and the historical reveals itself in a distinctive way.

Yon has opened her dedication and research to a group of students. This publication is, therefore, also a configuration of a living document to incite further study—one that provokes movement and invites a continuous rethinking of movement research.

Stuttgart, November 2024
Cristina Gómez Barrio and Wolfgang Mayer
(Discoteca Flaming Star)

Yon Natalie Mik is an artist, dancer and writer based in Berlin who works through performance, poetry, sound, and installation. Her multidisciplinary practice, studies and creates living archives—ever-transforming, unreliable yet resilient—that choreographically rewrite socio-cultural landscapes distorted by hate, greed, and fear.

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Studies on Squats is the fifth book in the publication series *Die Frau mit 50 Füßen*. The series focuses on collective and individual artistic practices and discourses central to the Department of Fine Arts / M.F.A. *KTPP (Körper Theorie und die Poetik des Performativen – Body, Theory, and the Poetics of the Performative)*. It invites reflections on performative practices as ways for engaging with time and space, handling objects, and sharing time with audiences. The series aims to encourage the cross-fertilization of proposals, thoughts, and questions about performativity and contemporary art both within and outside the academy.

The M.F.A. *KTPP*, a practical master's program, enables students to formulate deeper artistic positions within the field of performance. The program emphasizes working with material, linguistic production, and theoretical reflection as independent yet inseparable components of artistic practice. Its diverse student practices offer insights into the evolving nature of today's performance, shaping a multifaceted, inclusive, and expansive definition from both teaching and research perspectives. One of the specificities of the M.F.A. is its engagement with cooperative formats and collaborations among *KTPP* students, not primarily to reach outcomes, but to foster a conflicted process in which to think about relations of publicness. Since 2018, the program has been led by Cristina Gómez Barrio and Wolfgang Mayer, also known as the basis of the collective Discoteca Flaming Star, with Felix Ensslin co-directing until 2022.

Performance & co-teaching is a cooperative fellowship between the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design, as represented by its M.F.A. program *KTPP*, and Akademie Schloss Solitude. It aims to make a crucial contribution to the practice and teaching of contemporary performance. The fellows so far have been: Cara Benedetto, Teresa Solar, María Salgado, Silvia Das Fadas, Niall Jones, and Yon Natalie Mik.

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