

Contribution by Agnese

Dancing with the ghost:

a score for honouring the place



I wouldn't say observing ghosts is my practice as an artist, however, I can't help noticing them. Having lived abroad for a long time, and now trying to reintegrate in Latvia after 15 years, ghosts - and the difference between our ghosts and the Belgian and Finnish ones - call for my attention. I observe their traces in places and people.

We gathered here, in LAUKKU residency, where there is still a strong presence of the deceased former owner of the property. He takes up a significant space in our conversations, and his colourful paintings cover the walls of the main studio.

The following score was conceived during / is based on / a dance practice that was led by Sabine on Friday morning. Here's the poem that conceived during the automatic writing session of the practice:

*We do have agency in our relationship with the dead.
There is always the power of life, plants, the river*

*the river speaks your name – a broken line – radio static –
the fatigue of other centuries seeps in*

a shaman screams in the snow, and smoke climbs up his cry

beautiful backs, eyes in the spines

so happy you all can be together in the father's yard

to connect with oneself across centuries

parents laughing at the joke

shamans greet the river kindly – white birds are swallowed by the mud

**THE SCORE:
DANCING WITH THE GHOST**



Photo by Sabine Neilande - ghost dancer - Agate Bankava

In East Asian animism, spirits that inhabit specific locations are referred to as “landlords” (Tudigong, 土地公). When individuals move into a new area, they often seek permission from the landlord to reside there. These landlords are the indigenous inhabitants; we are just passing through, sometimes leaving behind new layers of ghosts.

The cosmologies of Baltic animism, preserved in folklore, are incomplete. We lack comprehensive knowledge of the hierarchies among local spirits, as written histories are primarily recorded by colonizers. Nevertheless, a rich tapestry of ancestral voices and stories emerges from 700 years of diverse colonizers, wars and movements, contrasted with about 150 years of local tribes' literacy and self-determination efforts.

This score aims to connect with the land we traverse through non-intellectual forms of listening. Our bodies serve as powerful instruments for receiving and retrieving information and for interaction with the past.

STEPS

1. **Identify the ghosts.** You may read old periodicals or talk to locals about the place's history. Or / and, you can have a circle with participants to talk about ancestors - someone who has left an imprint on them, someone whose presence they still feel. You can also research the mythology that you feel is relevant (any remarkable water bodies, trees, stones around? churches?) Then, make a list of mixed ghosts and read it out loud before the beginning of the practice. A 'ghost' can be anything: a person, a deity, an event, a pet.
2. **Sensitize the antennae.** Work in couples: there is the "doll" and the "ghost". The doll is the receiver, and starts by lying still. First, the "ghost" sensitizes the doll's body by bodywork, then it starts to manipulate the limbs. Little by little, the doll starts responding and waking up, until the touches of the ghost serve merely as an impulse for the movement.
3. **Listen.** Then, the doll leaves and the ghost remains for a solo dance of around 10 minutes, exploring the absence of the doll. You may use music that is connected to the place - either created there or some ethnomusicological recordings. Doll observes the dance.
4. **Expand.** After 10 minutes pass, the ghost heads outside and can either go for a walk or a dance-movement exploration of a chosen location. The doll follows and observes without intervening.
5. **Take notes.** Afterwards both enter an automatic writing exercise for 10 minutes and switch roles.
6. **Harvest.** The session is concluded by a harvesting circle or 1:1 conversation between participants. Reflect on the presences felt and observed.