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Embodying the inhuman: towards hybrid identities (Performance, video and paper)

This presentation is partly a performance and partly spoken reflections on the making of "Vodou vibrations sounds of memories of fields and burdens living in translations and broken bows balancing on plateaus while speaking to one self and scratching the surface of the raft while drifting away", a solo performance with video projections and prerecorded sounds, performed by Vietnamese dan tranh player Nguyen Thanh Thuy, choreography by Marie Fahlin (SWE). This is one of several explorations at the threshold between music and dance in the frame of the international artistic research project Music in Movement, headed by the Malmö Academy of Music. I am a Vietnamese dan tranh player and in my professional career I have experienced how a female musician is presented on television in Vietnam objectified as a "beauty" playing a traditional instrument, always in traditional costumes and in a picturesque setting. But already since my early childhood, my body was socialized into pleasing movement patterns. However, in the collaborative work with Marie Fahlin on "Vodou...", I experienced a new body that was not the body onto which Vietnamese cultural meanings had been inscribed for 35 years. When the choreographer asked me to cut off my archive and to move as if I were an animal creeping on the floor, I found it possible to step out of my body and I could e.g. look at my deformed hands scratching on the wall as an object external to myself. The working process can be understood also from a gender theory perspective: [...] "the body" is itself a construction, as are the myriad "bodies" that constitute the domain of gendered subjects. Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender; the question then emerges: To what extent does the body come into being in and through the mark(s) of gender?" (Judith Butler, 1999, p. 12) From this perspective many questions arise: What, or who, is the "I" performing in the piece? If I can disconnect the pleasant body schemes of a Vietnamese woman, what is the relation between my "new" body and the body that used to be mine? The piece became a vehicle for articulating a critical perspective on my embodied identities both as a musician and as a Vietnamese woman. A core method in this process was the adaptation of inhuman behaviour in the making of the choreography.

Nguyen Thanh Thuy studied at the Hanoi Conservatory of Music where she received her diploma in 1998, followed by a Master of Arts at the Institute of Cultural Studies in 2002. Since 2000 she holds a teaching position at the Vietnam National Academy of Music. Since 2012 she is carrying out an artistic doctoral project at the Malmö Academy of Music concerned with gesture in traditional Vietnamese music. She recently published a book chapter in an edited book on Cambridge Scholars Publishing, and live recordings and a book chapter in (re)thinking improvisation: artistic explorations and conceptual writings, (Lund University Press)