San Keller
Operating Report

A as in Autobahn. A as in Alphabet.

Talk given as part of the performance event “Betriebslage” at Wartsaal Wipkingen. Curated and organised by Bettina Filacanova and Stefanie Rübensaal. With performances by Regula Michel, Stefanie Rübensaal, Bettina Filacanova, Stirnimann-Stojanovic, Cickindunt, Sunny Pfalzer and San Keller.

Saturday, 9 May 2026, 6–6:30 pm,
Wartsaal Wipkingen,
Dammstrasse 54, 8037 Zurich

I have some A5 cards here.

Please just write the first letter of your first name on them.

In large letters.

So that each of you is present through a letter.

If you get bored with what I have to say about the night walks, you can read this book:
my current favourite, the “Duden Dictionary of Etymology”.

It feels appropriate to speak here.

The railway station already offers everything I will be talking about today.

A draught.

Direction.

Rhythm.

Passage.

The train moves.

The track gives direction.

I am now going to spend about 30 minutes giving you a report on my practice of night walking.

I originally wanted to write a coherent report.

A report
that could be archived.
But as the night walks themselves continue,
my perception of this practice has changed.

Not its form.

The night walks still take place.

Month after month.

Like traffic
that keeps rolling.

But within this continuity,
certain aspects have suddenly become more pronounced.

Perhaps this talk is therefore less a report
than a reflection
on an existing practice
that continues.

I have been doing night walks since 1998.

At first, I developed a new format every year.

Each winter season:
November to April.

Every month:
one night.

Back then, I was mainly interested in the situation between people.

The night as a social space.

The group.

Being on the move together.

And perhaps the most important thing back then was this:

Suddenly, I no longer needed a “work of art”.

The experience itself was enough.

That is also why I began to forgo documentation.

Then the format disappeared for quite some time.

Not because it was over,
but because my life in the art world
had become too mobile.

I was travelling too much to remain physically present every month.

In 2020, I resumed the night walks.

Under the term:

Distribution Landscapes.

The term interested me
because it already contains a contradiction.

Landscape sounds open.

Almost romantic.

Distribution, on the other hand,
means movement,
circulation,
calculation,
logistics.

How long does a commodity take?

Where is it transferred?

How efficiently do these processes run?

I began to take an interest in this operational side of our environment.

When I resumed the night walks,
I initially returned
to the original rhythm in time:

From November to April.

One night walk every month.

At that point, however, the individual walks were not yet directly connected in space.

The distribution landscapes changed:

The Swiss Plateau,
the Rhine Valley,
Ticino,
Valais.

So the development initially lay less
in a change of format
than in an increasingly precise spatial order.

At first, there was only the rhythm in time.

Later, a sequence in space was added.

Valais marked the first season that formed a continuous whole.

From Brig to Lake Geneva.

The individual night walks thus became part of a continuous movement through space.

And something important happened there.

In Valais, the valley frames the infrastructure.

Orientation still comes largely from the landscape itself.

Along the A1, this shifts.

There, the infrastructure itself begins to provide orientation.

The motorway becomes:

Direction,
order,
a frame of reference.

That is why we have been walking along the A1 for the past two years.

From St. Margrethen to Geneva.

Four winter seasons.

One stage every month.

We will arrive in 2028.

In this sense, it was not only the practice that developed,
but also the inquiry within it.

Not through a change of format,
but through an increasingly sharp focus:

from a rhythm in time,
to a sequence in space,
to orientation along an infrastructure.

And at some point last season,
I began to notice
that something had shifted.

I used to be more interested
in what happens between people.

Today, I am increasingly interested in a form of sociality
that also works without direct exchange.

An operational sociality.

Traffic is a good example.

We speak different languages.

And yet, almost anywhere in the world, we get into a vehicle
and immediately understand
how we need to move within this system.

The road works operationally.

Perhaps that is why, at some point, infrastructure began to interest me more than landscape.

Landscape is heavily loaded with art-historical associations.

The questions always arise:

Who is looking?

How are they looking?

What becomes visible?

Infrastructure interests me
because it provides orientation
and thereby determines
what becomes visible.

Distribution means:

Movement.

Circulation.

Transfer.

How long does a commodity take?

How efficiently do these processes run?

And perhaps there is also a connection here
to our everyday lives.

To the question
of what drives us at all.

Of how we move
through such systems every day.

I have begun
to compare infrastructure with language.

Not as a system of meaning,
but as an operational order.

Hence the letters, too.

This week, my attention was drawn to an artist
who apparently never really thought about an audience:

Rolf Winnewisser.

In the 1960s, he worked
on a literacy programme in Africa.

And suddenly, this connection began to interest me:

Language,
signs,
orientation.

Infrastructure is full of signs.

Lines.

Markings.

Directions.

And yet I began to realise
that I can see it perfectly clearly
without really understanding it.

Perhaps that is precisely where its power lies.

In being constantly visible,
constantly used,
while remaining open in its meaning.

The night walks work in a similar way.

We do not use the road directly, after all.

We do not walk on the A1.

We only use it to orient ourselves.

And yet it determines:

Direction,
rhythm,
movement.

The train moves.

The track gives direction.

Being here at the station made that clear to me again.

The infrastructure organises the situation
before anything even happens.

And at the same time, my own role began to change.

The audience used to be central.

Or at least more important.

Today, I am no longer so sure.

This season, I had an experience
that I call the Egerkingen feeling.

Between Zurich and Bern,
the distance was too great for six regular stages.

So I organised a weekend
with two night walks.

From Friday into Saturday.

From Saturday into Sunday.

With a daytime stay at the Mövenpick motorway hotel in Egerkingen.

And I thought:

People are bound to come now.

Because someone is always saying:

“I would join in at the weekend.”

Nobody came.

And to be honest:

I did not miss anyone either.

That was an important moment for me.

Because I began to realise
that the relationship had shifted.

No longer primarily
between me and the audience.

But between me
and this infrastructure.

And at the same time, I realised
that this form of sociality
still exists.

Even without direct encounters.

The night walks remain a shared practice.

But in a different way than before.

Perhaps comparable to a cinema.

Over the past few years, I have started going to the cinema more and more.

And I began
to keep the tickets.

Not just as reminders of the films,
but also
to make a rhythm visible.

When do I go to the cinema?

How often?

At what intervals?

The cinema, too, began to interest me as infrastructure.

People enter a space together.

Their gaze turns in the same direction.

Attention is synchronised.

And yet people do not talk to one another.

This strongly reminds me
of the night walks.

There, too, something shared emerges
without a constant need for exchange.

So I also began
to compare film and road.

And to ask myself:

What, in film,
corresponds to the role of cold
in the night walks?

Because in the night walks, the cold
is not simply a condition,
but a driving force.

It keeps bodies moving.

Standing still becomes uncomfortable.

You keep walking.

In film, dramaturgy works differently.

There, it is not the cold,
but perhaps:

Suspense.

Expectation.

Rhythm.

Things
that carry the gaze forward.

And at the same time, the night walks
are never only about the night itself.

They are always also
about the day to come.

The tiredness afterwards.

The return to everyday life.

The question
of how you will keep functioning

without seep.

Perhaps this, too, is a form of prospectivity.

A future state
already organising the present.

That is also why, since last year,
there have been summer night walks.

The Rimini Classics.

Along the Adriatic coast.

And there, I suddenly realised
how important the cold really is.

Because the summer walks
are much more exhausting.

The driving force is missing.

The dramaturgy no longer quite works.

And yet it is precisely this repetition that interests me.

Continuing
the same structure over many years.

Not to prove a thesis.

But because, within repetition,
perception shifts.

Perhaps the question itself changes as a result.

Incidentally, there is a Blue Moon this month.

There was a full moon on 1 May.

And there will be another on 31 May.

At first, I did not even know
there was a term for this.

A Blue Moon occurs
when two systems of order briefly coincide.

The lunar cycle
and the calendar.

Perhaps it is precisely such moments that interest me.

When different structures
briefly become visible.

You see:

When you work with clear grids,
special moments suddenly emerge as well.

Like a Blue Moon.

And that actually encouraged me
to continue within this operational structure.

The night walks will continue as planned.

The monthly rhythm will remain.

Perhaps also
because it has less to do with acceleration
than with a recurring cycle.

A structure
that repeats itself.

Month after month.

Like a lunar cycle.

And yet I am increasingly interested
not only in the movement itself,
but also in
what comes before and after.

The space around the night walks.

Arriving.

The lingering effects.

Digesting.

How long does it actually take
to process an experience?

How long does it take
to become still again?

Perhaps that is precisely where
another form of perception emerges.

Not in walking itself,
but in holding.

In stopping.

In standing.

So, for next winter, the plan is
for me to spend longer at places along the infrastructure.

“Halten” — to hold — is actually an unassuming word.

And yet I was surprised
by how many forms it can take.

Anhalten — to stop.

Aufhalten — to stay, to hold up.

Durchhalten — to keep going.

Aushalten — to endure.

Mithalten — to keep up.

Nachhalten — to follow up.

Einhalten — to observe, to adhere to.

Behalten — to keep.

Unterhalten — to entertain, to maintain.

Stillhalten — to hold still.

Stillstand — a standstill.

Innehalten — to pause.

Zurückhalten — to hold back.

Zusammenhalten — to hold together.

Wachhalten — to keep awake.

Offenhalten — to keep open.

Freihalten — to keep clear.

Perhaps standing
will become more important in the future
than walking.

Right.

That's it.

Thank you.

Could you show me the letters once more?