

To Forgiveness!

Based on a conversation with Irene Böttner and Philipp Gufler on 23 April 2023.

While preparing for this evening, I was gifted with an extraordinary meeting. Meeting with the mother of Lorenza Böttner, arranged thoughtfully by Philipp Gufler, who also took on the duty of being our translator. Thank you for that, Philipp.

Irene Böttner is a remarkable, loving parent, a witness, who advocates with all her heart to not diminish her child's art and humanity. For Lorenza and her work not to be reduced to a category or an identity. Through her careful words, electrifying memories and sense of humor, over an *Apfelkuchen* I could connect to a remarkable person who was calling Irene "her mother". I could feel how their bond shines over time. I am suddenly transported: to Lorenza on a scholarship to New York, to 1983, looking at the rings and fur coats, wishing to buy her mother some of them beautiful things and calling her up about it. It is an honest intention that counts, Irene said, laughing, as it was rather obvious that Lorenza could not afford this gift. I would buy it for you, Lorenza said, if I had money.

From my experience of working with the archives of artists who have died of HIV-related illnesses, who died from AIDS, even up till recently, I know how remarkably open, and protective, open in a good sense of this word, and warm, is Irene Böttner's attitude. I see it in stark contrast to many family members who put (or had to put) a veil of silence and shame on their queer and/or HIV positive children. It seemed to me as if Irene's words and presence is carrying Lorenza, carrying and passing Lorenza's truth along.

When Lorenza told Irene about HIV, they held a full-family meeting about this situation. They discussed altogether whether Lorenza should go public about her status. They lived in Munich, one of the most affected cities in Europe by the HIV epidemic, at the time. It was 1984. There was the evil politician Peter Gauwailer, there was the anti-AIDS sentiment in the city. Stigma and political repression. Family was understandingly worried that the world may now start to close off on Lorenza. That she won't be able to present her work anymore. Irene was sure that Lorenza would act responsible with others because she was "a person of honor". Lorenza was infected by a lover in New York who sadly yet consciously has been infecting others with HIV. I have no reason not to believe that Lorenza forgave him. She was surrounded by people who loved her till the end.

Just a year before a tragic accident in the aftermath of which Lorenza had both of her arms amputated, when Lorenza was 7, she said to Irene: "One day I am going to be famous". After Lorenza's death Irene went to a fortune teller with the photographs of her family members. Fortune teller said to Irene pointing to the picture of Lorenza that this person is going to be famous. That she will live. How is this possible?, asked Irene. This person is not alive. "They will be famous", said the fortuneteller, "They will be famous anyway".

This is why I would like us to gather here around the works of Lorenza Böttner. To celebrate her. To commemorate her. To watch her dance. To make a memory together. To dance for her. On 31 December 1993, on New Year's eve, two weeks before passing away, Lorenza raised a toast to her family: "To become better humans", she said.

Lorenza had hope till the end. Till the end she believed there would be effective medication. With every trouble in life that happened to Lorenza, she stayed uplifted and proud, she never stopped with life. The

only place she would avoid would be a hospital as she spent too much time there as a child. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why Lorenza chose not to medically transition. When Lorenza was no longer bearing to be alive with HIV ravaging her body, she found herself taking her last breath in the mobile bed of a speeding *Krankenwagen*. On the way to the hospital. Lorenza never stopped with life until she did. Rabe never stopped with life until they did. At “Substitutes”, today in Amsterdam, at the exhibition initiated by an artist Philipp Gufler, their work is shown for the first time since their early deaths. Together again.

This is why I would like us to gather here around the works of Lorenza Böttner in the company of Raven. To celebrate them. To commemorate them. To be in their presence. To watch Lorenza dance. To dance for her. You can see her dancing in the performance “Let me live” from 1986, from the Spanish Theatre in New York. Lorenza is introduced with a male pronoun by a conventionally female speaker to be a master student in the arts, and the speaker corrects herself, in the performing arts. What follows is a body of Lorenza appearing onstage, wearing nothing but a translucent fabric and swiftly shedding this second plastic skin before lending herself out to the expressive movements of *danse libre*. The coming sequences will unfold a drama of being (forcefully) socialized into an ableist, rigid and binary gender roles, to the distinct sound of “Master and Servant” by Depeche Mode. Lorenza resists both prosthetic arms and masculine dress. Eventually, her stage character ends up trapped as a male office clerk, in a crossfire between a man and a woman, humiliated by the sticky green notes flying over an empty plate with no meal in sight. Rolling her eyes and sighing.

On 31 December 1993, on New Year's eve, two weeks before passing away, Lorenza raised a toast to her family: “To become better humans”. Lorenza continued: “Now, we want to ask for forgiveness from the people we hurt”. Soon after Lorenza called a friend to ask for his forgiveness. But her friend was unfortunately not picking up the phone because, at the same time, he was supporting someone else who was also dying. Irene went on behalf of Lorenza to ask as Lorenza was not able to do it anymore. In fact, Irene delivered more of last messages, some of them in the form of a painting, to ask for forgiveness from Lorenza to the people she cared about in her life.

This is why I would like us to gather here around the works of Lorenza Böttner and Rabe, being the bird raven, perplexum. To celebrate them To commemorate them. To be in the presence of them. To watch them dance. To dance for them. Let us toast:

“To become better humans”

“We want to ask for forgiveness from the people we hurt”

“To forgiveness!”

We are going to play two songs for us by Hildegard Knef, one of Lorenza’s favorite German songstresses. Thank you every and single one of you for your presence tonight. Thank you Billy, Philipp, Dana, Irene Böttner and the team of W139 who made it possible. And thank you, Lorenza. And thank you, Raven.

Written by Szymon Adamczak for performance “Keeping Up with the Virus”, presented with Billy Mullaney on 11 May 2023 at W139 as part of the public program of the “Substitutes” exhibition, initiated by artist Philipp Gufler.