

# Tanz im August Review: THE AGENCY is where post-human workout meets immersive theater

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AUGUST 14, 2018 By [Omnified](#)



Photo by Nico Schmied

## A POST FOR OMNIFIED BY ISABELLE HORE-THORBURN

**At some point during [THE AGENCY'S](#) performance of [Medusa Bionic Rise](#) (MBR), an activewear-clad performer will usher you out of the SoulCycle-esque club stage to a sterile, windowless room where your "softshell" will be analyzed for vaguely medical purposes. In a sort of real life, online privacy policy landing page, you are asked to give verbal consent for your biodata to be used by MBR. Many of the movements that comprise the 90-minute performance contain little to no dance per se, though every video confessional vlog, mantra, monologue, and supplement drink is deeply concerned with the body and its potential for optimization.**

MBR was most recently performed as part of [Tanz im August](#), a festival for contemporary dance with performances in venues across the city. As I descended below the main stage of the Berliner Festspiele this weekend, I noticed that this subterranean, post-human space smelled eerily like a gym: a familiar intermingling of Tiger Balm, sweat, and plastic. We were admitted, one by one, into something between a nightclub, a bodybuilding convention and a BodyPump class. In MBR, THE AGENCY has employed the trappings of fitness culture to reach far beyond a facile critique of consumer culture to ask the viewer if they are "ready to rethink the reality

of their body.”

For anyone who is uncomfortable with the language of wellness and the general atmosphere of a mega-gym, the fitness class is already a dystopian hellscape. As each session broke out, I became increasingly disoriented to my previously held ideas about the allure of transformation and very quickly the resemblance to a conventional gym began to disappear. At a bar surrounded by DJ decks and IV drips, supplements were chopped up and mixed into test tubes, soon to be imbibed by audience members and instructors alike. The farcicality of someone leading an aerobic routine in kitten heels and shin pads as they shout “are you pregnant or just fat?!” serves to suspend a viewer’s skepticism for long enough to introduce the next tenant in their radical transhuman manifesto.

THE AGENCY, which includes Rahel Spöhrer and Yana Thönnies, as well as Magdalena Emmerig and Belle Santos, describe MBR as “a fitness movement that is characterized by a radical affirmation of self-techniques such as fitness and shaping, neuroenhancement, surgery and use defined by technological extensions of the body.”

Like all successful “movements,” the message of MBR is articulated in tidy epitaphs by charismatic mouthpieces. Bodybuilders create percussive background with guardrails and their own bodies, as instructors pronounce “You are wetware,” and “Your body is a strategy... a battlefield... a resource... a potential.”

If MBR is a cult, then Stacyan Jackson is the leader. She leads her adherents in chants like “fat, carbs, protein” and then invites them to sit with her as she recounts the story of her mother’s dangerous and expensive gastric bypass surgery.

THE AGENCY borrows effectively from the absurdity of fitness and wellness culture to produce a view of the future that is fun and thought-provoking. By using the methods and strategies of “the cult,” the performance groups create a truly immersive experience.

*Check out our full coverage of Tanz im August on our website.*

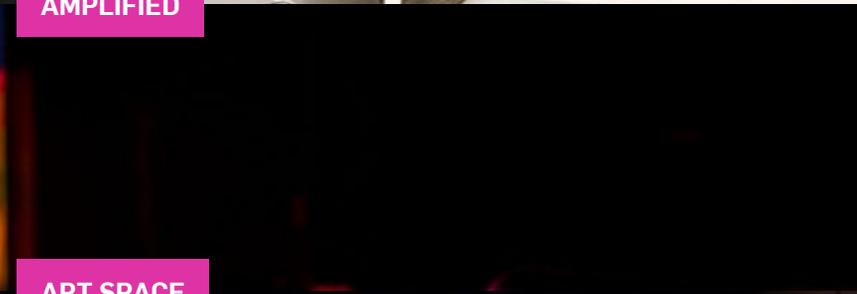
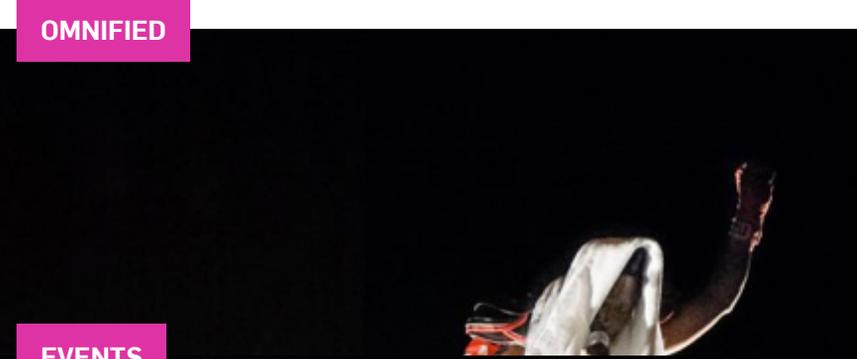
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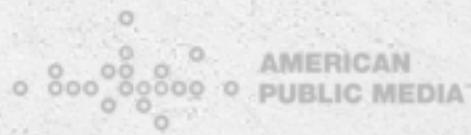
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