

TEO ALA-RUONA & THE WORKING GROUP

Damnat

2027



Photo: Vikram Prahdan

CONCEPT

Damnat is a performance for two performers, and a chef. The work continues Ala-Ruona's long-term practice and artistic research into the effects of sociopolitical norms on how we relate to and understand the body. It follows Ala-Ruona's previous works *Lacuna* (2021) and *Parachorale* (2024). *Damnat* is a co-commission with **Zodiak – Center for New Dance** and co-production by **Toaster**, Copenhagen. The work will premiere in **Pannuhalli, Dance House Helsinki**, in May 2027.

Damnat explores the philosophical and poetic possibilities of non-normative embodiment, transforming theory and autobiographical experience into dance through the performers' embodied research.

Damnat directs this research toward medicalized modes of thinking that categorically divide the body into parts, focusing particularly on the brain–gut axis. The work examines diagnostic language as a method of organizing and separating bodily functions, and thus shaping our social behaviours. Through devoted dance that strives toward metaphysical shifts in body and psyche, growling vocalizations, and staged character development, the piece subverts expectations of the

body and communication. The work pushes aside classifications of body parts as either normal or pathological, confronting the audience with a body whose distortions unfold across linguistic, physical, and symbolic registers. The choreography emerges from an intensive, multi-year shared practice of dance, movement, and character research between Ala-Ruona and Tomic.

Underlying the work are two personal experiences through which Ala-Ruona approaches these questions: intestinal pain and transcorporeality. In *Damnat*, these experiences are opened as reflective planes against theory and philosophy. While the research behind the piece addresses the history of pathologizing trans people, the shared exploration with the working group ultimately expands the inquiry toward broader questions concerning conceptions of the human. The piece functions as a performative research into the societal body.

Through its multi-year process, *Damnat* reconsiders language's power to produce the normative subject. The performers seek to "digest" this language through the body's own metabolic processes, allowing a more indeterminate sense of self to emerge. The work aims to open deep para-poetic modes of expression within the performing body while unsettling projected, categorizing interpretations.

Trans embodiment has often been approached in psychological discourse as a neuroanatomical disorder—through structural differences in the brain, including disturbances in neuronal networks in the hypothalamus. In *Damnat*, this "disturbance" represents the performers' capacity to transform limiting and categorising thought into a merged, holistic, and category-transcending bodily experience. Likewise, the gut becomes a site where categorical thinking dissolves, breaking down and mashing like food. The term "second brain" refers to the nervous system of the gut, which is connected to the brain. In *Damnat*, the brain and the gut are both the subject and the material: tools for research and choreographic practice. On stage, the chef prepares and serves food that supports the gut microbiome's breaking-down power, such as fermented products.

Ala-Ruona is the director of the performance and one of the performers. On stage Ala-Ruona is joined by dancer/choreographer **Mina Tomic**. The performance also features a food artist **Pola Sutryk**, who prepares and serves food on stage. The dramaturg is **Ami Karvonen**, sound designer is **Tuukka Haapakorpi**, light designer is **Sofia Palillo**, costume and spatial designer is **Teo Paaer** and producer is **Sanna Ritvanen**.

ON THE PERFORMANCE MATERIALS AND RESEARCH

Architecturally, *Damnat* examines the hospital as a modernist institution designed to diagnose and classify bodies, separating the "sick" from the healthy. The research includes visits to 20th-century hospitals, which have influenced the set design, evoking abandoned medical interiors and a hospital room. The set is constructed using surplus materials. The audience is seated on three sides of the performance space. In the center is a tiled stage referencing the hygienic spaces of hospitals. At one end of the space stands a large welded table referencing an autopsy table, on which the chef cuts abstract jelly sculptures referencing various organs, which are eventually consumed by the performers and audience members. An artistic dialogue about food and digestion, as well as the symbolic potential of food between Ala-Ruona and Sutryk, becomes a central part of the work's research.

Damnat delves into the performers' brains and digestive systems, searching for a corporeality that transcends language. The choreography emerges from holding the brain and applying pressure to it, from the imagined repositioning of body parts and psychic emptying oneself of the social categories. The performance combines growling and minimalist binaural auditory illusion composition. The script, co-written between Ala-Ruona, Karvonen and Tomic focuses on the brain's internal dialogues, which gradually unravel into incomprehensible language, aiming at vomiting the diagnostic language out of the body.

Ala-Ruona works with extensive source material. One of the key philosophical foundations in *Damnat* is the concept of the "body without organs" (originating with **Antonin Artaud** and later developed by **Deleuze** and **Guattari** in *Anti-Oedipus*), alongside schizoanalysis, both of which are reflected upon in relation to the pathologization of the trans body. Ala-Ruona asks how the categorical division of the body into gendered or psychologically "disturbed" parts affects our understanding of its potential.

The work enters into dialogue with the plays of **Samuel Beckett** and **Sarah Kane**, as well as with Artaud's texts. The working group studies these materials, which explore the shifting boundaries between body and mind. Language—and its power to categorize, as well as its potential for reimagining—is at the center of *Damnat*. Language and food symbolize each other in the piece. In the world of the performance, words are "force-fed" to the performing bodies in the form of food. However, during the performance, these words are ingested again as food and metabolized, breaking down and mashing categories.

PREMIERE

Zodiak, Pannuhalli, Helsinki, May 2027

PRELIMINARY SPATIAL INFO

- adaptable to different sized spaces
- 50 - 400 audience members depending on the space: it is possible to discuss and adapt to other venue dimensions and audience capacity ratios with the Artist and set designer.

WORKING GROUP

Director, performer: Teo Ala-Ruona

Performer: Mina Tomic

Chef: Pola Sutryk

Dramaturg: Ami Karvonen

Sound designer: Tuukka Haapakorpi

Light designer: Sofia Palillo

Spatial and costume designer: Teo Paaer

Producer: Sanna Ritvanen

SCHEDULE

Year 2025:

Preliminary production, applying for residencies and grants, seeking co-producers. Inviting

musicians, and a chef to the process. Writing texts in collaboration with Karvonen, and preliminary development of performer practices. Initial design work with sound, set, and costumes.

January - June 2026

Residency work, refining performers' work, choreography, and dramaturgy. Initial rehearsals with the chef.

August - December 2026:

Residencies. More rehearsals with the chef. Finalizing the script with Karvonen.

January - May 2027:

Intensive rehearsal period. Premiere of the work in Zodiak, Pannuhalli, in Helsinki.

June 2027 onwards:

Touring with the work. Toaster, Copenhagen. **InKonst**, Malmö.

BIO

Teo Ala-Ruona is an interdisciplinary artist based in Helsinki, working within the expanded field of performance. His practice explores the potential of somatic fiction to shift our perceptions of the human body, navigating the intersections of linguistic, semiotic, and biological existence. In using the performing body as a site for speculative narratives, he investigates how alternative stage politics can transform the perceptual frameworks of both performer and audience. Grounded in theory and embodied scores, his work treats the performing body as both a reflective surface and an active agent in negotiating inherited categories.

His work derives enjoyment from the absurd, the transgressive, and the impure, weaving carefully crafted audience engagement with deeply embodied performance practice. It balances emotional and psychological tension with moments of humor and tenderness.

Ala-Ruona's work has recently been shown in **The Biennale Architettura 2025** (Venice), **Performa Biennial** (USA), **The Vilnius Biennial of Performance Art** (LT), **The Finnish National Gallery Kiasma** (FI), **The Institute of Contemporary Arts in London** (UK), **Sequences** festival (FI) and **Toaster** (DK). In the spring 2025 he will show new work in **the 19th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice**, in the **Nordic Countries Pavilion**.

MORE INFO OF THE ARTIST

Website: <https://teoalaruona.net>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/teoalaruona/>

Email: teo.alaruona@gmail.com

Email of Ala-Ruona's producer: sanna.ritvanen@gmail.com

TEASER

<https://vimeo.com/1109095644/38ccb59fac?share=copy>

PHOTOS

By Vikram Pradhan

