

How do we touch? How do we invite?

About participation and hospitality
in performing arts for young audiences



Content

Imprint

Professional exchange "Öffnung und Enthierarchisierung: Auf dem Weg zur sozialen Choreografie" organized by Theater o.N. and tanzhaus nrw | February 23–24, 2024 in Düsseldorf and May 15, 2024 in Berlin

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Introduction

Dare to try new things

Dagmar Domrös

Dear Readers,

This collection of essays is the outcome of a two-part exchange initiated and organized by Theater o.N. and tanzhaus nrw in 2024. The cooperation between the two organizations began in 2023 with the aim of bringing together practitioners from the fields of contemporary dance and theater for young audiences. Sharing our different perspectives and combining our expertise has proven to be mutually enriching.

The two meetings in 2024 were dedicated to the wider topic of opening up the dance and theater scene to new audience groups and pushing aesthetic boundaries. In 2023 we had looked at intergenerational forms in dance and discussed the advantages and restrictions of age specifications as well as participatory choreographies. These discussions had shown that the focus on access and dehierarchization is most effective precisely at the point where the considerations about “hosting” are directly incorporated into the artistic work on productions.

Touch & respect

The first meeting of 2024 took place at tanzhaus nrw in February on the occasion of the Düsseldorf premiere of Alfredo Zinola’s new production “THINGS at the End of the World.” We brought two choreographers into conversation who have been exploring themes of touch and interaction in their work: **Alfredo Zinola**, whose performances deal with aspects of participation in divergent and radical forms and **Hanna Bylka-Kanecka** (Holobiont collective), in whose works tactile elements and a shared aesthetic experience between an intergenerational audience and the performers play a major role.

Producer, mediator and lecturer **Micaela Kühn Jara** moderated the conversation and lead the participating professionals through a workshop. She gave insights into different concepts of participation and offered examples before inviting us to reflect our own working practice. **Elisabeth Wellershaus** accompanied the exchange in Düsseldorf and gives an account of the two days in her article “**Touch & respect. On forms of touch and being touched in the theatre.**”

On hospitality

In May in Berlin we picked up the conversation where we had left off in Düsseldorf. We asked Micaela Kühn Jara to continue with another workshop, involving questions related to hosting and hospitality: How do we invite? What makes our audience feel welcome? In a mix of inputs, conversations and small group activities we circled these questions before entering in a discussion with blind performer and dramaturge Silja Korn, director Daniella Strasfogel and access dramaturge Susanne Tod. They talked about access and inclusion and their experience with multi-sensory staging concepts. **Julia B. Laperrière** was witness to this **day on hospitality** and wrote about it in her essay, subtitled “**On resisting assumptions and language(s) as access.**”

The question of how multi-sensuous approaches could enhance our role as hosts when producing and presenting work for young audiences has accompanied the research and rehearsal process for a new Theater o.N. production that was specifically trying to merge access and aesthetics.

On June 29, 2024, the play “**Ein Fest für die 13. Fee**” (A party for the 13th fairy) premiered at Theater o.N. The ensemble piece for seeing, blind and visually impaired audiences was collectively developed by the members of the theater and initiated by three years of research on the fairy tale “Sleeping Beauty,” that explored motifs such as the image of the thorn hedge as a double metaphor: for protection, on the one hand, and exclusion on the other. In “13. Fee” we address experiences of exclusion, while at the same time trying to create an aesthetic space that is warm and welcoming to many who haven’t felt invited before. Under the title “**Unpacking a party**” **Coila-Leah Enderstein** and **nicola van straaten** share a playful response to visiting the premiere at Theater o.N.

Pursuing the desire to become more accessible as a theater and exploring how the process of deconstructing power relations could also be reflected in the productions and their aesthetics was the motivation for the exchanges and activities considered in this brochure. We hope they are thought-provoking and inspiring to risk new approaches in shaping a more equal and diverse performing arts (scene) for young audiences together.

Touch & respect

On forms of touch and being touched in the theatre

Elisabeth Wellershaus

Independent theatre practitioners met at the tanzhaus nrw in late February to discuss participative approaches to dance for young audiences.

If I search the internet for the term “participation,” the first thing that appears is a post from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. The text declares that participation is an “important creative principle” in development cooperation – in the communication between very different people, population groups, organizations, associations or parties. Although national-level politics probably don’t provide the best practical examples of the sensitive handling of power relations, in theory it’s nice to think that people in small groups or larger transnational contexts are encouraged to strive for shared languages and forms of negotiation and contact – despite their differences. The only problem is that not many people – whether in institutional or private contexts – have the necessary tools to do so. Very few are schooled in non-violent communication or have a precise idea of how complex the business of inclusion and participation actually is.

Preschools and elementary schools would be good places to experiment with this. But the pedagogical traditions don’t always allow the required openness in dealing with children. So educators who wish to encourage young people to explore their interests and agency through self-empowerment and participation must consistently look for new ways of doing so. And in doing so they often end up in children’s and youth theatre, in cultural spaces well known for their open and experimental approaches.

Currently, however, children’s and youth theatre is having to think about what participation can be in times of narrowing minds. The theatre scene is having to ask itself how it can reach young people at a moment of political upheaval and social challenge, and how it can look for new and creative ways of ensuring their inclusion. In order to explore these questions, choreographers and dancers, creative directors and producers came together on February 22 and 23 at the tanzhaus nrw on the invitation of Theater o.N., from Berlin, who organized the symposium together with the tanzhaus, the dance theorist Micaela Kühn Jara and the choreographers Alfredo Zinola and Hanka Bylka-Kanecka. The title

“Touch & Respect – Approaches to Participatory Choreography in Dance” was chosen to cover the potential of participative concepts, the struggle with institutional and artistic hierarchies, the accessibility of theatre spaces, and performance content.

The two school classes standing in the tanzhaus foyer on Friday morning already occupy the space with a natural ease. Through the partnership with the tanzhaus they are comfortably familiar with the surroundings in which Alfredo Zinola is about to present his new choreography, “THINGS at the End of the World.” The children’s familiarity with the tanzhaus can be seen in their warm-up with the dance educator Annika Wolf. When Alfredo Zinola and Salome D’Attilia greet them at the entrance to the auditorium, they enter the darkened space calmly and come to a halt in front of a low barrier. After a moment, ethereal music plays quietly, and at most only a mumbling can still be heard. But when one of the many large stones lying at the back of the space begins to move, as if by magic, a murmur of astonishment goes through the children.



When Zinola and D’Attilia collect the youngsters at the barrier and lead them to their seats in fours and fives on a cord, the game of proximity and distance gathers pace. But the tempo will only increase occasionally during the per-

formance, for example when Zinola spiritedly rolls a large cloth ball – which could represent a greeny-brown planet Earth – towards the audience and the children shriek with glee. Otherwise spectacularly little seems to happen at first. Zinola and D’Attilia variously arrange and rearrange the stones, present them to the audience in beams of light and douse them in some magic dough that slowly and impressively spreads over these rock formations. The expectation of a haptic experience, of an event the children can join in through touch and action, is disappointed here. And yet at no time can impatience be felt from the young audience.



In the post-performance discussion the children seem to have been inspired. A number of things interest them, from pragmatic questions about what the stones and the cushion-like “globe” are made of, to the conjuring trick at the start of the performance, to issues of outer space, environmental protection and their own existence. One child asks about the identity of Salome D’Attilia – the performer at Zinola’s side, who wore a smart lady’s suit and had a deep voice, seemed difficult to place. But in this, and throughout the discussion, Zinola and the producer Micaela Kühn Jara make no attempt at demystification. They answer the question about gender identity with a cautious hint that here too it’s possible to think in many directions, that there isn’t just the one answer. And the children do appear to leave the theatre with more information – and seemingly touched.

Shortly afterwards, only adults are left sitting on the floor of dance studio 7. The participants have travelled here to share their experiences from Salzburg, Amsterdam, Berlin and nearby. But before Alfredo Zinola und Hanka Bylka-Kanecka give thumbnail presentations on their respective practices, they invite us to engage in a short moment of

direct contact. In twos, and with eyes closed, we are asked to explore our partner’s hands, and – also with closed eyes – to dance in front of the other person, who watches us. It quickly becomes apparent how intimately the encounter with a stranger can be configured within a few moments. How swiftly the microscopic barriers of one’s own defenses can be raised, and how inexperienced even people from the performing arts can be with touch.

After these short exercises, one question is on everyone’s mind: how do you forge relationships in theatre spaces that have long been defined by the traditional separation of performers and audience? Alfredo Zinola states the problem right at the start of his talk, and emphasizes that for him it applies to all forms of encounter – also to those between human beings and objects. It’s an interesting and extensive field, particularly because it concerns the inclusion of the very young. For where does participation start if children, as in “THINGS,” are initially required to view what’s happening from a certain distance, first through a barrier and then through the non-verbal messages of the performers?

“You don’t have to touch something to have a haptic experience,” Micaela Kühn Jara says later. In their joint work with children, both she and Zinola aim to foster a sense of empathy, the knowledge that lies in exploring the relationship between proximity and distance. “In the case of ‘THINGS,’ proximity is the mediating element, the impetus to unusual forms of interaction,” they say. How close children can get to their curiosity, knowledge and ideas about certain issues through an exploration of the person-object relationship had already become apparent during the morning’s performance. Through making associations to nature, to the Earth and space, and through the experience that it’s even possible to connect to one’s own surroundings on an abstract level.



"This is an artistic approach that's very influenced by external stimuli," says Kühn Jara in response to Zinola's input. It's informed by an involvement with the environment and with things. An almost opposite approach is taken by Hanna Bylka-Kanecka, whose somatic practice proceeds from interior to exterior strongly guided by inner physical impulses.

Bylka-Kanecka begins her talk with a very personal story about how her artistic career was inspired by pregnancy and motherhood. She speaks of her fascination with her altered physicality, and with how much energy she drew from her new role as a young mother. But she also makes clear how little understanding there was for young parents in her sphere, how limited their possibilities were, and how frustrating it was – both for her children and for herself – to be unable to find spaces outside of conventional family and educational structures. "I wanted my children to have creative input in their lives," she says, and explains that she initiated the Holobiont collective for this reason. In reference to the piece "My Tail and I" she tells how certain themes need to find the right framework. This production, for example, looks at human tailbones from an evolutionary perspective. But the linguistic ambivalence arising from the Polish word for tail could have implied a piece about genitals, which would have broken a taboo in Poland, so an English title was chosen instead. Bylka-Kanecka doesn't focus solely on the needs of children. "I'm very aware that children's baggage includes their parents, that their experiences are always linked to the relationship between them and their carers."



This thought immediately gives rise to a discussion between the participants. The key question has to do with suitable formats for inviting audiences of parents and children into the performing events. How to define thematic and practical frameworks without abandoning the magic of the theatre? While Zinola and Kühn Jara distance themselves from overly explanatory approaches, others recount their positive experiences with discussions before or after performances, and with accompanying formats that can serve as guidelines for young viewers and those looking after them. There is discussion of the idea of collecting children's questions in class after going to the theatre. The artists could reply to the schools by video, which would keep the theatrical experience in its proper place while maintaining the dialogue.



More and more ideas are collected, but by 5 p.m. most people only have enough energy left for a last piece of pizza. But two hours later we're wide awake again. "Club Toulouse," the piece we see that evening as part of the festival PLAY FULL at the Forum Freies Theater Düsseldorf (FFT), divided opinions among symposium participants, but it left no one cold. The two high-spirited young performers of the Belgian company Kopergieterij approach the audience far too loudly and wildly. So much so that the issue of being touched continues into the evening. How much the piece actually borrows from Parisian nightlife and Toulouse-Lautrec, as the program suggests, is debatable. But this performance too raises questions about the fragility of relationships.

On Saturday morning we're invited to another workshop by Micaela Kühn Jara. From her point of view participative approaches combine experiences from artistic, social and educational areas, and she gives us several vivid examples. One is that of a choreographer friend who worked with a

group of teenagers and had to struggle with challenges of all kinds. A month before the planned performance the young people told her they didn't want to go on stage. But instead of throwing in the towel she was able to ensure the performance took place – by showing the whole process in a solo developed with the teenagers. Another example is of a choreographer who interviewed the inhabitants of a small village. Over several weeks she went for walks with people who told her what they understood by dance. This collaboration also led to a choreographic work.

Behind these examples is the idea that alongside what the theatre traditionally offers creatively by way of performance and outreach there can also be an organic, shared development of artistic content. Kühn Jara also refers to philosophy and research, and quotes Donna Haraway, Erin Manning or Jacques Rancière in maintaining that the boundaries between host and guest can blur in the performance context – in operating outside the theatre, for example. "When we work in schools, say, we are the gatecrashers," she declares, "while in the theatre we're usually in the role of host." The aim is to explore complex roles against changing backgrounds, to find out what it means when parents, teachers or artists influence a young audience that already perceives the artistic interchange quite individually. Against this background we shall discuss the issue of invitation and boundaries once more, and talk about where contact can occur between audiences and performers, between theatre spaces and everyday places. And about how participation isn't an end in itself but should always be linked to an intrinsic artistic motivation.

"In my view this goes far beyond the concept of interaction," is how Kühn Jara concludes her talk. "Participation has the power to shift the content and narrative levels of a piece," says Hanna Bylka-Kanecka in agreement. And in a final group discussion on the participants' current projects it can again be seen how quickly the boundaries between active and passive participation can blur. How a narrator can become a listener or documentarian within a few minutes – only to turn into a co-creative ideas generator in the next moment.

Translation from the German original by Michael Turnbull

Hanna Bylka-Kanecka is a theatrologist, choreographer and mother and is actively involved in advancing choreography for families in Poland. Her interests encompass the political aspects of choreography, somatic practices, psychoanalysis, and posthuman reflection. Since 2018, she has supervised content for the *Roztańczone Rodziny – Dancing Families* program (Performat Foundation). Bylka-Kanecka is also an initiator and co-founder of the *Holobiont* collective created together with choreographer and improviser Aleksandra Bożek-Muszyńska and creative producer Karolina Wycisk. The collective is known for creating interactive family performances such as "roundABOUT," "Moonland," "on_line_," "Where shapes have necks," and "My Tail and I." In 2023 she also started individual choreographic practice. She became a core member of the Young Dance Network in 2022 and co-curated the Forum on Contemporary Dance and Choreography for Young Audiences in Children's Art Center in Poznań in 2023.

Micaela Kühn Jara works in the fields of dance and education with a focus on participation and young audiences. She has a background as a dancer but now engages in various roles including production, education, conceptualization, and research. She is the creative producer of Alfredo Zinola Productions in Germany, developing contemporary performances for young audiences, and serves as an artistic advisor for Dansehallerne in Denmark, bringing dance to schools through hybrid formats. Additionally, she guest lectures at the Danish National School of Performing Arts on topics related to participation, artistic-educational practice, inclusion, and creative practice.

Alfredo Zinola is a dynamic performer and choreographer whose passion for modern dance was cultivated at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen, and further fueled by studies in anthropology and intercultural communication at the University of Turin. Known for his collaborative spirit, Alfredo's creative journey thrives on partnership with fellow artists. From captivating interactive performances like "PARTY" designed for children aged 6 to 10, to the thought-provoking exploration of bodies in "PELLE," his portfolio showcases a commitment to engaging audiences of all ages and backgrounds. His latest piece, "THINGS at the End of the World," pushes boundaries by delving into the intricate dynamics between audience, performers, and the non-human entities sharing the stage. With each project, Alfredo Zinola invites us into a world of imagination, connection, and exploration. As part of the exchange program, his new production "THINGS at the End of the World" will be shown at tanzhaus nrw.

A day on hospitality and multi-sensorial performance making

Or in other words: on resisting assumptions and language(s) as access

Julia B. Laperrière

Notes from the author:

Note 1: Upon rereading my notes of the day, I realized they were written in German, English, French and Spanish. At the end of this article, I look shortly at the concept of heterolinguisism in relationship to access. Throughout the text, words in different languages will appear. It is an informal and playful proposal, interested in generating small cognitive glitches, possibilities for glissement of thought and navigation between languages.

Note 2: Citations in pink and italic throughout the text come from written notes of things workshop participants expressed during the day. The wording/language might not be exact and they aim to rather give a general idea of what was expressed.

Since March 2023, Theater o.N. and tanzhaus nrw have been collaborating to organize professional exchanges on relevant topics in the field of dance and theater for young audiences. On May 15th 2024 took place the fourth meeting at the Tanzhalle Wiesenburg in Berlin, a day of workshop and discussion with a focus on hospitality and multi-sensorial performance making. The event was titled: **“Wie laden wir ein? – Zur Verschmelzung von Access und Gastgeber*innenschaft in der künstlerischen Produktion”/“How do we invite? – On the convergence of access and hosting in artistic production.”**

The interest for the topic developed as a natural continuation of the last meetings. The previous Fachaustausch focused on intergenerational work and pieces for audiences of all ages, as well as the notion of participation in choreography, looking at ways we can Grenzen auflösen between public and Künstler*innen, also questioning traditional hierarchies.

The last Treffen took place in February in Düsseldorf, on the topic of touch and respect, and around the programming of “THINGS am Ende der Welt,” choreographed by Alfredo Zinola. The piece worked on proximity and interaction without touch, or the idea of stimulating the sense of touch without haptic touch actually taking place. Zinola often puts

a lot of attention to the moment an audience enters the theatre room, and the question of how we welcome audience in. Thinking about the role and responsibility of the Gastgeber led the two institutions to explore the topic of hospitality for the May Treffen.

Fachaustausch – Overview of the Day

Workshop on Hospitality

In the morning and afternoon, we are invited to a workshop on hospitality, led by Micaela Kühn Jara. Micaela wears many hats and has been working with dance and participation through different lenses, one as a lecturer at DDSKS – The Danish National School of Performing Arts, another one as artistic producer, dramaturge and Vermittlerin with the dance company for young audiences Alfredo Zinola Productions.

After an introductory round, the first thing she does is to position herself and clarify from which point and which experience she speaks. The second is to put forth the question of language, reminding us that not everyone in the room is a German native speaker, inviting us to use easy language, short sentences, and simple vocabulary. Already, the question of language in relationship to access appears, or as I’d be tempted to name it: language as access.

When one looks at access, the first question to ask is always: who is not in the room? As a non-native German speaker and as a non-European, I can’t help but feel the lack of diversity: by this point we are all white (one person of colour will join later), and in a field as international as the performing arts, language is often the first barrier. In attempts to lower this barrier, offers of translation are reiterated throughout the workshop. Not wanting to advocate for English – a dominant language that would also exclude some people in the room – I will look later at the concept of heterolinguisism and its possibility to create a space of play, where everyone can contribute and where no one has the expectation – or can claim the privilege to – understand everything all the time.

Warm Up

To warm up, we start the workshop with a physical exercise in couples. One person gives a touch, to which the mover (with eyes closed) needs to respond by activating the body part at the point of contact and moving against the touch. The giver offers a suggestion (the touch), but the mover conserves agency in the way of responding, especially with the idea of the movement going *against* the touch and not *with*.

*Als Gebender kann ich nicht richtig manipulieren.
– Workshop participant (see note 2)*

In this exercise, the touch is the Einladung, a warm and comforting one. It asks: Wo gehen wir zusammen? Just as the mover conserves some agency, the space between the invitation and the reaction will become our space of investigation for the day.

As a host, when you welcome an audience, you can prepare the food, set the table, set the mood, but controlling the environment only goes so far and in the end the guest also have their own agency. An interesting friction lies there. When working with children, how much agency are we willing to give? Letting go of control, or practicing risk management, how do we cater to this space of freedom, or create the illusion of it?

A Radical Invitation

The warm up is followed by an introduction to the concept of hospitality proposed by Derrida, as a political concept that can also be applied to performance making. Derrida speaks of two extremes when it comes to hospitality: what he calls 'conditional hospitality' and 'unconditional hospitality.' While he speaks mostly about it on political terms – e.g. concerning borders and policymaking – Micaela proposes to look at how this concept could be applied to art making, and how to challenge the roles we traditionally assume when we consider a performance as a space for hospitality, whether in a theatre, a school, or site-specific. She gives two concrete examples:

Example 1: "PELLE" – Alfredo Zinola Productions

In "PELLE," adults are blindfolded and guided into the room by the children. Once arrived on stage, there is an invitation to touch the performers, bringing them into movement. Again, the children serve as guides to the adults, facilitating their tactile experience.

In "PELLE," audience members serve as activators. Without their participation, the piece doesn't happen. This invitation is a risky one, and a lot of the research phase was about developing strategies for this risk management. To find the balance between giving agency to the spectators and bringing them to touch and play with respect. The setting challenges traditional roles and hierarchies between audience and performers, adults and children, putting forth the question of 'who is responsible for whom.' "PELLE" is radical in its reversal of usual hierarchies and distribution of responsibilities, not only social hierarchies but also hierarchy of the senses, as it prioritizes a multi-sensorial approach where vision is dethroned. The children are suddenly being given the double responsibility to care for their caretakers as well as for the artists, and the development of the piece is in their hands.

*Wenn die Einladung völlig radikal offen aussieht,
braucht es viel mehr Präzision von uns.
– Micaela Kühn Jara*

Example 2: Domino Effect – Rapid Eye

In the frame of Dans for Børn, the circus company Rapid Eye was invited to do a version of their piece Domino Effect for schools. Dans for Børn was a specific format initiated by Dansehallerne in Denmark, which brought dance to schools in formats of 90 minutes. Initially, the time was distributed between a piece (or excerpt) followed by a workshop. Not particularly interested in giving juggling workshops or doing a 'watered down' version of their artistic proposal (in order to make it fit in a gym), the company decided to take the mediation format as a starting point for a modified artistic proposal. Together with consultant Micaela Kühn Jara, they reimagined a format where participation was at the core of the work. Similarly to „PELLE,“ the new proposal needed the children's help in order to move forward.

Rapid Eye starts with the performers playing on big wooden planks, which delimitates their stage. After a while, they start deconstructing this 'stage', and suddenly bring the planks to what was previously considered the audience's space. The children have to move, to help with the transport and the manipulation of the planks, and there is a complete deconstruction of the space and of the separation between audience and performer.

Here, the invitation is a very directive one. The audience's space is literally invaded. There is a wish to break the rules previously established in the space, den Raum zerstören. However, through the performativity of the cast, the playful-

ness transforms this invasion into a collaboration, and the children are invited to take on the role of helpers, becoming active builders of the stage, and eventually, the piece. The invitation hängt von der Performativität des Künstlers ab.

This example brings to the surface another recurring question of the day: the challenge of festlegen ohne zu beschreiben. Or in other words, how can *what we do* be stronger than *what we say*? A strong artistic proposal or an efficient invitation should be experienced rather than explained.

Gespräch on multi-sensorial performance making

In the afternoon, we will assist to a talk between Silja Korn, Daniella Strasfogel and Susanne Tod on the topic of multi-sensory work, moderated by Micaela Kühn Jara. Silja Korn is a performer, teacher, Erzieherin and a blind Beraterin currently collaborating with Theater o.N. on their new production. Daniella Strasfogel is a musician, performer and theater maker focussed on young audiences and families. Susanne Tod is an access-dramaturge, director and mediator with an expertise in sign language and a focus on projects addressing inclusion and diversity.

Sharing their experience with multi-sensory concepts, the idea is to look at the artistic potential that can unfold from pieces addressing different audiences with different sensory perceptions, for example a mixed audience including visually impaired or hearing impaired people.

You can put a blindfold on and feel what it's like to not see for an hour. But you can't know what it is like to live blind. For this you need me.
– Silja Korn

What came out strongly of that talk for me was the imperative to *not assume*. Interestingly enough, I believe this imperative could be applied to the rest of the day, whether it be working with visually impaired people, hearing impaired people, people with disabilities or children. Treat your audience as the experts, and invite them into the process as early on as possible. Do not assume, but question, try out, find out together.

When we do research, what if we consider the children as the experts.
– Working with Alfredo Zinola and Micaela Kühn Jara

The second thing that came out was the central question of *why do you do it*? Here, I could denote two main tangents.

One was about access being part of the artistic concept from the start: doing it out of real commitment, having it as a departure point or central interest for the artistic research. To not look at it as an added layer, or excess costs, but rather for the creative potential it can unleash and the discoveries that can be made along the way. Another perspective was that accessibility measures should become a normalized baseline. Addressing a general audience should also include addressing people with different abilities.

And so should working on a multi-sensory level. Coming from the performing arts, so much attention is put on being fully present in all of our senses. If the importance of perception, sensoriality and sensitivity is constantly reiterated in our training, why is it that performance making should suddenly cater only to the visual sense?

It was also noticed that although much is left to be done, great improvement was made in this department in the recent years by the city of Berlin, where the description of accessibility measure is now a mandatory section in the Bewerbungsformular as well as on the Spielstättenbescheinigung provided by venues. This sensitizes both artists and venues, and encourages them to take these measures seriously to increase their chance of a project receiving funding.

Example: Spielstättenbescheinigung für
Hauptstadtkulturfond 2024

Welche Merkmale der Barrierefreiheit erfüllen Präsentationsort/Spielstätte? (Zutreffendes bitte ankreuzen)

- Menschen mit Sehbehinderung und Blindheit
- Menschen mit Hörbehinderung
- Menschen mit motorischen Einschränkungen
- Menschen mit kognitiven Einschränkungen
- Zugang für Rollstuhlnutzer ebenerdig oder über Rampe möglich
- Wegweiser mit Piktogrammen zu Kasse, Toilette, Spielstätte, Gastronomie
- Bei Bedarf personelle Unterstützung für Menschen mit Behinderung vor Ort
- Barrierefreie Website mit Hinweisen zu Ausstattung und Angeboten
- Unsere Website ist teilweise in Leichte Sprache übersetzt, wir weisen außerdem auf der Website direkt auf Angebote wie bspw. Audiodeskriptionen hin.

Finding Resonances

All in all, the day was very rich in exchanges, and since many of the topics of the morning and the afternoon resonated together, I will try to give a topical overview about questions that were discussed throughout the day, whilst finding resonances between the different interventions.

Roleplay

If we take Derrida as a source of inspiration, it is interesting to take a closer look at the different roles artist, institutions and audience take on within the context of performance. In a traditional theatre setting, the roles are often fixed. The audience comes to the theater, they are the guests. The institution and its staff play the host, and one could almost say the artist (or the dance) is the meal, or what is served. Depending on the type of play (for example when the fourth wall is very strong), it is not always the artist's responsibility to host and I am always astonished to see shows (often for adults) where the artist doesn't seem to consider the public as an essential element.

CONDITIONAL HOSPITALITY

- Reciprocity (certain expectations towards guest)
- Right to visit but not to stay
- Requirements (border control, ID check, etc.)
- Roles are fixed (the host stays the host and the guest stays the guest)

UNCONDITIONAL HOSPITALITY

- Open doors
- Nothing is expected from the guests
- No border/door/key, no ID checks
- All are welcomed, also unexpected guests
- The roles are fluid (ex: the guests can perform hosting, etc.)

*"It's between these two figures of hospitality that responsibilities and decisions have to be taken in practice."
– Derrida, Paper Machines*

In plays for young audience though, facilitation and hosting become a much more necessary part of the experience, and although the performance of hospitality is most often a conditional one, the workshop encourages us to perceive the different roles as more fluid.



A lot of performances for children happen in schools, often in the gym-hall. The question of ownership of the space then comes up. Whose space is it, who is welcoming whom? When artists enter a space that is usually inhabited by the children, they are confronted with a set of rules and behaviors that already exist outside of their artistic proposal. In order to compose with these – as trying to deny them can lead to chaos or enormous amounts of disciplining needed – it can be interesting to perceive ourselves as guests, and consequently adopt a different set of behaviors.

Considering ourselves as guests also invites us to reconsider other roles, where teachers will hopefully become allies, and some more experienced children can be given responsibility, invited to become 'satellite helpers.'

Der Ort as point of departure

This example of the gym-hall invites us to consider the specificity of the place where the performance will take place. Some participants suggest taking the 'place' as departure point. It is the case of Daniella Strasfogel for example, who experimented with creating scores for families and kids in playgrounds. Ironically, she discovered that kids in a playground often just wanted to play, rather than follow contemporary dance scores.

*We wanted to allow them to inhabit the Spielplatz differently, but then they just wanted to play. (laughs)
– Daniella Strasfogel*

Each place – the theater, the gym-hall, the Spielplatz – comes with its set of rules. When we aim infiltrate a place

with art, we must decide where we want to play along: which rules are necessary, which ones do we want to break or establish, and what knowledge do people already arrive with. The more established the rules, the bigger the performative shift will have to be, or the more radical the artistic proposal, in order to allow new behaviors in.

*„The more a path is used, the more a path is used.“
– Sara Ahmed, What’s the use?*

This sentence from Sara Ahmed approaches use as something that can bring quite conservative behaviours. For me, when we think about the ‘place’ as departure point, it’s interesting to think about the way a place is used, and the set of behaviours ‘use’ produces. In the context of performing arts, I find Ahmed’s concept of queer use quite inspiring:

„Queer uses, when things are used for purposes other than the ones for which they were intended, still reference the qualities of things; queer uses may linger on those qualities, rendering them all the more lively.“¹

While using the qualities and initial functions of the place to its advantage, queer use also poses the question of ‘who?’ gets to use a place/a thing, much in alignment with notions of access: *“queer use might refer to how things can be used in ways other than how they were intended to be used or by those other than for whom they were intended.”²*

When we talk about access, programs that bring arts to school and to different neighbourhoods are essential, and many insist on the importance of bringing art to ‘vulnerable’ or less privileged populations. Others insist on the importance of inviting kids to the theatre place, on making the event or art ‘special,’ or ‘extraordinary.’

We once collaborated with a school from Marzahn. For some kids, it was the first time they were entering the city of Berlin. The whole experience was extraordinary, door opening.

Alternatively, if the theatre belongs to the artists, and the school or Turnhalle to the kids, some participants propose the possibility of investing a third ‘neutral’ space, where the question of ownership can be momentarily suspended, flattening hierarchies and putting audience and performers on a more egalitarian point of view, where a set of rules isn’t pre-established.

Communication and Preparation

In the context of performance for young audiences, the question of the invitation – normally a direct one, i.e. would you like to come to my birthday? – becomes an indirect one, where communication has to go through third parties such as parents, school, teachers, etc. In this tri-party relationship, who should the communication really address and how? What would happen if we would send letters of invitation directly to the children, and how would the text differ?

*What if children choose which pieces are programmed?
Last year we organized a prize for which the jury was constituted of children. It could happen more widely, but the logistics can get complicated.*

Since guests are here only partly responsible for themselves, it is important to make the contract clear. What will happen, what can one await. Often, on one hand, institutions want to give as much information as possible, preparing guests and reassuring their doubts. On the other hand, artists at different production stages might not be ready to give this information, or might also want to protect the mystery of the creation, leaving space for the experience to happen. When thinking about accessibility, the need for information can sometimes go both ways:

*When I don’t know who comes,
wie kann ich mich gut vorbereiten?*

When dealing with diversity and inclusion, one quickly encounters a tension between the wish to make a piece for all, whilst simultaneously recognizing that specific audiences have specific needs. What makes a performance feel safe for someone might make it exclusive for someone else. How to deal with this dichotomy? Here, specificity is key.

*Wenn die Zielgruppe nicht genug definiert ist,
kommt niemand.*

Gleichzeitig, it’s crucial to leave room for poetry. Especially if we are interested in providing multi-sensorial experiences, it’s important to not over-explain the art and trust people’s capacity to absorb a work in different ways. In other words, when you host, you need to leave space for the party to happen. No one likes a control freak.

On one hand, giving information gives agency and allows different parties to feel prepared and safe. On the other hand, giving room for imagination leaves space for the

magic to happen. It's about finding that fine line. When it comes down to the experience, to not prescribe but offer.

Foyer as Zwischenraum

Following the steps of communication and preparation arises the importance of the initial Begrüßung: who welcomes the guests, and how are they prepared, informed and trained.

Speaking in smaller groups, we arrived to the concept of the foyer als Zwischenraum. The foyer is specific to theatre, but the concept can also be transferred to other places as this liminal space of tampon between 'reality' and entering 'the fiction of the theater.' More practically, we could call it the outside and the inside, this in between space where we can operate towards the suspension of disbelief, and if wanted/required, the suspension of hierarchies or traditional roles.

What we learn from work like "PELLE" is that how we operate in this space can be determining for the rest of the performance, therefore it is important to conceptualize this space and time as an integral part of the work. To give it the proper importance it deserves, as it will set the mood for the rest of the piece, affecting people's availability, ability to relax, to be critical, and in the end their capacity to receive and appreciate the work.

In this Zwischenraum, one of the central questions revolves around trust. Trust can't really be built or established in 5 to 10 minutes, so it must be an artificial contract, a proposal. In "PELLE" for example, the performers offer transactional trust: "hey, please trust us, we are trusting you". The risk goes both ways, there is a reciprocity. But to be able to take such a big risk, much research and practice is needed beforehand. In Zinola's work, risk management becomes a craft, a skill, not only relying on the formality and clarity of the entrance proposal, but also very much depending on the performers ability to be inviting and welcoming whilst conserving clear boundaries.

Other more traditional example of the use of the foyer as a mediation space would be the warm ups proposed in tanzhaus nrw, where informed mediators invite audience members for a collective *mise en corps* 15 minutes before the piece. Here, the idea is to familiarise an audience to the content of the piece, whilst activating the body, therefore putting it in a more receptive state to see, perceive and feel dance.

The importance of context

Cíntia Rangel: I presented a try-out of my work 'Baobab' in Nigeria. There is a part in the piece where I get children in the audience to manipulate my hair. [Cíntia is a black choreographer from Brazil and has dreadlocks.] It is a very nice and easy interaction in the play. But when I came back and performed it in Germany, I was suddenly confronted with all the context coming with that image. I suddenly couldn't perform it in the same way.

Julia B. Laperrière: So what did you do? Did you find a solution?

Cíntia: I looked for the person of colour in the room and went to them, but I felt a bit bad about it.

Julia: I don't think you need to feel bad. It's important to protect yourself, your subjectivity and your vulnerability as a performer. It's also important to protect the original image you wanted to communicate.

Cíntia: It's true. Also, the piece is about how we can use ancestral knowledge to build the future, and this part plays with the ancestral image of the old person doing the hair of the young, in specific cultures.

The next day – "Über Überüberübermorgen"

The day following the Fachaustausch, I assisted to a theater play in Theater o.N. called "Über Überüberübermorgen." The Gastspiel was a production from Cécile Bally and Cathy Walsh in coproduction with the FELD Theater for children 5+.

Here again, translation as access came into play, and the normalization of addressing people in different ways. Offering many entries to a concept, the beginning of the play associated a sign (Sign Language – SL), an object, and a movement to a word – in this case "past, present, future" – and then went on to question our notion of time with some intricate dances and wordplay.

Later on, a character who can't speak German nor English expresses themselves through sound and movement. Their words are then translated into emojis (through a video projector), thereafter reinterpreted and translated to all by a third character. Are emojis the new universal language 🤔?

Whilst normalising the integration of sign language and offering different sensorial input for one same concept (majorly visual and audio in this case), the piece unfortunately missed the opportunity to stick with the concept past its rather strong opening section.

Translation as access – practicing heterolinguism

Looking at my notes from the workshop, I noticed they were written in French, English, German and Spanish, as well as accompanied by signs and drawings. I realized that between the Fachaustausch and the Überüberübermorgen-Stück at Theater o.N., I experienced in two days a multitude of different languages: those named above but also sign language, Brazilian Portuguese, audiodescription, tactile and movement based communication, music, visual communication, etc.

Whether it be from a language to another, from a sense to another, from a context to another (i.e. in Cíntia's case), I consider translation to be a means of access, and a political one too.

In this perspective, I would like to take inspiration from the concept of heterolinguism, a term coined by Rainier Grutman in 1994 and more recently studied, defended and given body to by Myriam Suchet, professor and researcher at the Sorbonne University in Paris. Suchet writes: *“Unlike bi-, pluri- or multi-linguism, which leave each of the idioms present untouched, enhancing them at most by virtue of a diversity that remains external to them, the prefix ‘hetero’ emphasizes the difference that transforms them from within.”* For her, it's about radically modifying the imagination around “the language,” rather than merely adding or juxtaposing different ones as if they were stable and homogenous entities that could avoid contamination.

In the context of the Fachaustausch and the play “Über Überüberübermorgen,” I find interesting how multi-sensorial approaches and the presence of different languages – and when I say language I mean it in an expanded way – can create frictions, and how these frictions allow interpenetration, possibly creating new hybrid languages – propriété of no one and façonnés par chacun (toustes)/property of no one whilst potentially crafted by each. Moreover, I'm inclined to perceive these frictions and plurality as something that we can learn from and that can profoundly change the ways we communicate and approach or consider others.

If everyone steps out of their comfort zone, we might land on a more equal playing field, rather than able people being the comfortable ones all the time. We could practice getting used to other people's needs being attended first at times, or other languages than ours being spoken in the room – whether spoken, signed or multi-sensorially addressed. To not assume the world is made for me, should cater to my needs, but rather recognise the multitude of needs. To practice de-centering my experience and to recognise how other experiences can affect mine and how I can grow from it. To cultivate porosity, welcoming the affection, the contamination, the discomfort perhaps, and the heterogeneity.

4 short prompts I leave with:

DO NOT ASSUME

Research, try out, invite early on, ask, test and find out with

ESSENTIALIZE YOUR AUDIENCE(S)

Make them essential, they are your experts

REFINE YOUR INVITATION

Information gives people agency

BE A COOL HOST

Leave space for the party to happen

1 Ahmed, Sara: What's the use? On uses of the use, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2019, page 26

2 Ibid, page 44

Unpacking a party

A playful reflection on “Ein Fest für die 13. Fee”

Coila-Leah Enderstein and nicola van straten

Once upon a time, two friends were sitting under a tree. It was a beautiful summer afternoon and the friends were chatting away. Their names were Wurzel and Blättchen.

“Did it start with a song?”

“No, remember they were making noises with pots and pans and things from offstage, the sounds of chaotic preparation and anticipation – it was really funny!”

They were discussing a performance they had seen recently.

“Oh Mann! Genau, I remember ...”

“... and then at some point it became a song.”

“Right.”

The performance was an interdisciplinary work – something between a musical, a fairytale and participatory theatre.

“I really appreciated the audio description. It somehow helped me to concentrate, even though I could see what was happening on stage.”

It was created for seeing, blind and visually impaired audiences from the age of six. The piece told the story of five hosts preparing for a party – their goal was for everyone to be invited and for no one to feel left out.

“Mh, integrated audio-description is a real craft. I think they struck a great balance between functionality and creativity.”

The friends paused, each drifting into their own reverie. Looking up at the clouds, Wurzel thought about the way music looks and the way objects sound. They liked the visual motet towards the end of the piece: like notes jumping around on a page, each of the characters performed idiosyncratic movements and sounds in choir formation on the tribune. Wurzel remembered another sequence where the lid of a pot was at first a mask, then became an instrument. The lid’s sound

became a song, and then an accompaniment to some action. Throughout the performance, a gentle overlapping of sensory inputs emerged through a kind of musical object theatre.

Blättchen, on the other hand, was thinking about the tactile materials on the walls of the theatre and how often the sense of touch is overlooked in stage design. They enjoyed the use of the tiny theatre space. The audience was seated against the walls and the performers moved freely around the middle of the space and up onto the tribune, where the audience would usually be seated. This intimate arrangement made Blättchen feel as though they were participating in the world of the story, not only observing it.



“I loved the costumes, it seemed like they were designed to be noisy – to give an idea of where and how each performer moved. This made them descriptive, but also somehow like instruments.”

“And that wouldn’t have worked in a bigger theatre, because amplifying would change the source of the sound ...”

“True. I spoke to one of the performers afterwards and she mentioned that the costumes were also designed with spe-

cific colour contrast in order for movement to be perceived by visually impaired audiences.”

“Hmm. It’s clear that they were working with access consultants from the onset of the production.”

A small breeze blew past, nodded to them both with a smile, and went on its way.

“Oh – I loved it when they waved that big sheet of fabric over us.”

“You know, I don’t really remember where that fabric came from. I was too busy enjoying the smell of the herbs that the one performer gave us – what was the character’s name?”

“Kräuterin.”

“Oh ja. Kräuterin, Vögelchen, Wuschel and ...?”

“D e r F a u l e .”

“Ha ha, yes. I loved that one! His slow lumbering movements and heavy way of speaking really balanced out the cast. His energy was like an anchor or like the bass of an ensemble.”

“And don’t forget the choir-conductor character! With her expressive tongs that she waved around like a wand ...”

“Die Gastgeberin!”

“Stimmt.”



“Do you remember when the fabric turned into a kind of tablecloth for the feast?”

“I remember. Although, didn’t it become some kind of funeral? The transitions between different scenes were so fluid, I’m finding it hard to recall the exact order but I remember a sense of sadness and mourning.”



“Yes. For me that was a really moving section. The candles from the feast introduced the idea of honouring those who are not present. This acknowledgment of loss, or absence, really landed when Kräuterin started speaking about her mother almost dying in childbirth. Remember? The fabric was being rolled up into the shape of a nest as she told the story. And then when she finished the story, she pulled a marble out from the fabric and rolled it across the stage to Wuschel, who then shared the story of her own birth. It was such a simple but powerful image – this transformation, or rather connection, between death and birth.”

“And it wasn’t just an image, but a descriptive sound. The sound of the marbles rolling across the floor from one character to another not only connected their stories, but also gave us a sense of space and relation. I loved that each character told the story of their birth, and the marbles rolling between them almost felt like the sound of intimacy of eye contact. Such a simple mechanism, but it really invoked a material gravitas to the moment.”

The friends fell silent, as they recalled the touching scene. After a while, Blättchen spoke again.

“I think it was really brave how they didn’t shy away from dif-

ficult topics, like death. It's not always easy to speak about things that don't have a straightforward answer with children and young people."

"It's probably because most people struggle to hold paradox and conflicting ideas. I think it was important that in the piece each character expressed their own fears and desires – it wasn't always easy between them."

"The whole piece actually showed the challenges of holding different needs and desires in one space."

"And how difficult this can be. Difficult, but possible. But yes ... It wasn't just happywashing. They were hosting a party, but they didn't patronise us or brush over the challenges of who to invite or how much food there is, and then other quite normal frustrations and fears, like not wanting to share the fun."

"True. Wuschel's sulking towards the beginning of the party was relatable. There are so many emotions around hosting a party, where the expectation is to have fun, but everyone's idea of fun is different."

"These questions about invitation, hosting, inclusivity, responsibility – they're all so important. How much are we responsible for ourselves and how much are we responsible for others?"



The friends continued to talk about the piece, recalling and remarking on different scenes, as the sun slowly made its way towards the horizon. They discussed the craft of layering theatrical devices with access tools and the difference between

theatre that is about an idea and theatre that "does" an idea. They spoke about how the many songs throughout the work served multiple functions – narrating stories, providing transitions, creating atmosphere and embodying themes of togetherness. Finally the friends reflected on how, when a performance is created with younger audiences in mind, it's often easier to be receptive and enter more quickly into the magical experience of theatre, and allow oneself to be transformed.

By this time, it was dark and Wurzel and Blättchen realised it was time to go home. As they got up and made their way, Wurzel said to Blättchen:

"You know, maybe we could write something about this work."

Blättchen thought it was a good idea.

"Ein Fest für die 13. Fee" (A party for the 13th fairy)

**A multi-sensory ensemble piece by Theater o.N.
For seeing, blind and visually impaired audiences
aged 6 and up**

Premiere: June 29, 2024

The great day has come! After centuries of preparation, the five hosts invite their guests to a party.

Welcome to everybody!

As for the five hosts, they have never been invited to a party. But they have studied hard and learned many clever things. At their party, things won't take a bad turn, as they did in the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale. Even if there are not enough golden plates for everyone, nobody will be left out of the party because of that. They want all their guests to have a place at the table and feel welcome and comfortable.

Idea, concept, script, direction The ensemble **Players** Iduna Hegen, Uta Lindner, Michaela Millar, Julie Peters, Andreas Pichler **Script editing, dramaturgy, audio description** Dagmar Domrös, Cindy Ehrlichmann, Lena Scheitz, Vera Strobel **Set and costumes** Cíntia Rangel **Costume co-creation** Lisa Bazan **Advising for blind audiences** Silja Korn **Production assistance** Marilyn Nova White **Lighting design** Iana Boitcova

Funded by the Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion



Authors

Dagmar Domrös is a freelance dramaturge. In 2010 she was part of the team designing the relaunch of Theater o.N. and carrying out the implementation of the new focal points "Theater for the youngest" and "Über den Kiezrand hinaus" ("Beyond the neighborhood"). Since 2012 she has been part of the artistic direction of Theater o.N. and has since conceptualized many of the exchange events and FRATZ symposia, which reflect current issues and discourses and put them into relation on production processes in children's and youth theater.

Coila-Leah Enderstein is a South African pianist and interdisciplinary artist. She earned her Master of Arts in Sound Studies from the Berlin University of the Arts in 2022. With a background in Western classical piano, Coila's experimental practice spans a range of disciplines. Since 2018, her work has explored the interplay between listening, history, and power. In close collaboration with nicola van straat, Coila delves into the complexities of coloniality across different temporal and spatial dimensions. Together, they adopt a playful, process-oriented approach that extends into their performance work for children.

Julia B. Laperrière is a French-Canadian choreographer, performer and facilitator based in Berlin. She holds an MA in Choreography from ICI-CCN Montpellier. As an artist navigating between Berlin, Montpellier and Montreal, the mix of languages, places, practices, people and genres – both artistic and identity related – constitute an integral part of their practice. Julia has been interested in work for young audiences since 2016, notably through their collaboration with Alfredo Zinola and Micaela Kühn Jara. Her first own work for young audiences, an adaptation of the piece "What Will Come" with Canadian collaborator Sébastien Provencher, is currently in production. Otherwise, Julia has lately been touring in Germany, Belgium, Canada, France and Norway. They also occasionally teach and have lately been teaching at the University of Osnabrück and Diorama/Jefta van Dinther studio.

nicola van straat is a South African artist, writer and performer with a background in dance. In 2019 nicola graduated from a Master's program in Solo/Dance/Authorship at the Berlin University of the Arts. Through their work they explore the relationships between knowledge and belief, focusing on concepts of time and (de)coloniality. Nicola is a zine-making enthusiast, an amateur herbalist, a semi-professional astrologer and a lover of gardens. Nicola has a long-standing creative partnership with Coila-Leah Enderstein, where the two artists share a creative practice that is quite experimental, highly concerned with resonances of coloniality, deeply focused on the value of play and very convinced about the importance of remaining connected to joy.

Elisabeth Wellershaus is an author, journalist and columnist. Her texts appear in various print and online media and anthologies. Her book "Wo die Fremde beginnt" was published by C.H. Beck in 2023 and was nominated for the German Non-Fiction Prize (Deutscher Sachbuchpreis). She is part of the editorial collective "10 nach 8" at ZEIT ONLINE and lives in Berlin.

