

**Phantoms
of Stability**

**An artistic
research
document**

**Andreas
Liebmann
(ed.)**



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Preface

Andreas Liebmann

This small booklet is a document of conversations about working with and on structures within the so-called independent scene (which should rightly be called the "interdependent scene"), experimenting with artistic freedoms, self-determined working methods, and thereby always exploring alternative societal models. As a text that you, dear reader, now have before you, it is one of several manifestations of my artistic research, which I have called "Phantoms of Stability." The artists all try to create stability in a field whose ground is constantly unstable. What are the practices, experiences and reflections on dealing with this state?

The funding for this artistic research has been provided by the Danish Ministry of Culture, a testament to their recognition of the importance of such work. As a part-time employee of the Danish Theatre Academy, I've been fortunate to have the opportunity to explore the vague, precarious, alternative, non-institutionally established as a field of research over the past two years. The funds have also been used to compensate the conversation partners involved in this book. I'm grateful for this support, and I believe it's crucial that more artists from the interdependent, independent scene have access to such funding.

For over a year, I've been facilitating a series of dialogues, inviting various actors to share their experiences. In eight two-hour online meetings, we, including Marijana Cvetković, cultural producer, lecturer and activist (Nomad Dance Academy and Station Service for contemporary dance, Belgrade), Annett Hardegen, artistic director of Vierte Welt in Berlin, and Storm Møller Madsen, researcher, dramaturge, and curator, came together. We shared contexts, experiences, conflicts, problems, depressions, strategies, joys and dilemmas related to shaping collaborative institutional processes in interdependent performance work. Excerpts from these rich conversations can be found in the book. Storm, Annett and Marijana also contribute to this collection with their own essay, each highlighting a central point of our discussion at that point in time.

At the Tårnby Park Performance Festival 2023, people who set up and run artistic institutions near Copenhagen were invited to exchange their experiences. The "Soft Clashes" symposium was moderated by Morten Goll, activist, artist and director of Trampoline House, and brought together artists and activists with a self-instituting practice like Kinéo 37, Gylleboverket, Nexus Dance, På den anden side. It clearly showed that artist-driven spaces, which are often structurally and financially precarious, need forums for exchange and the development of trans-institutional solidarity.

I experience both the online meetings and the "Soft Clashes" debate as performative acts. The direct meeting, the time spent together, create their own meaning. Everyone involved in the conversations prioritised the exchange, protecting it in the calendar from being taken over by everyday drift, showing up and getting involved. The exchange creates a common ground that stabilises. When we say goodbye after the talks, we know about each other. We are many. We work in different places, in various forms and manifestations on a cause with many things in common. Our experiences are similar. We have something to do with each other. We can learn with and from each other.

The experiences I brought to these conversations come from my work with Tårnby Park Studio. Tårnby is a suburb of Copenhagen, right by the airport. Here, together with others, I create artistic-social contexts using performance art and practice the constant reinvention of formats that can bring people from different social backgrounds together. Tårnby Park Studio (TPS) is the institutional framework for this. Different people get involved here on a temporary or longer-term basis. Calling the TPS an institution is already a performative act. The TPS only comes into being because people decide to do it again and again. Nobody is forcing us to do it, except our need to create a zone of thought and artistic action that functions differently. Sometimes it's not so easy to give this "differently" an appropriate name. What are we actually doing here?

During the exchange, I often asked myself how the insights gained could be translated into concrete work at the TPS. The experience of solidarity and the community of the many who make alternative institutional artistic processes gives a good feeling, of course. There are also moments of understanding. When Marijana Cvetković talks about her visit to a favela in Rio De Janeiro, I understand better why creating art within the social framework of Denmark often feels so detached from everyday life and an existential sense of meaning, and that there is a legitimate desire to create other connections. When Storm Møller Madsen describes the dilemmas of an independent curatorial team in Copenhagen working with an established institution that is constantly looking to exploit the artistic and curatorial processes as a brand, while the two artist-curators see their actual concerns and processes disrupted by this, I understand better how the idea of constant competition can hinder vibrant and surprising art events. When Annett Hardegen points out how the poor financial situation of artists prevents them from forming a solidary connection with the place where they work, because they have to be efficient, I understand better that some conflicts in artistic collaboration have their origin elsewhere than where they manifest - namely, in precarious living conditions.

It is these moments of understanding that find their way into my work. Institutional work is relationship work and the creation of frameworks for relationships and artistic events. It is also mental work. I can learn from the conversations that underfunding and being misunderstood by political bodies or art juries are part of the game. I can understand how working relationships can be shaped in such a way that they are characterised by generosity and openness towards coincidences or even accidents - even when the work circumstances are precarious, when finances and other resources are scarce. I can learn that part of this work is resistance work and that this resistance can be meaningful, communal and fun.

The constant weaving of work relations, the quest for curious openness despite a basically instable ground has no guarantee of success. You can't return the result if you don't like it. Stability is only ever an intermediate state. Balance comes from broadening your perspective beyond your actions. What I do in Tårnby is not just my thing, nor the local thing of a few. It is woven into a context, into a social and political reality that has different symptoms everywhere but is driven by the same factors. That's why we can have such a fruitful exchange about it. In concrete terms, our circumstances always look different. But the mechanisms that shape these circumstances are the same or very comparable. We can also learn from others being in similar but slightly "worse" or "better" situations. So we can see what we can work towards or prepare ourselves for other developments to come.

Henry Lefèvbre wrote that walls do not make spaces but people. This sentence also applies to art institutions, especially when they are phantoms that have to be reasserted into reality again and again by the imagination of the people involved. This book provides a few experiences and reflections on such assertions of reality. Perhaps it can be a support or a companion when you lose your balance again.

The book starts with excerpts from our conversations, followed by essays from each of us. These essays are closely linked to our discussions and introduce new perspectives. You can read the book in any order—start somewhere!



Online Conversations

Excerpts

Tårnby-Copenhagen-Berlin-Belgrade
2023-2024

15.03.23
DEPRESSION

ANDREAS: Last time we spoke I asked why do something, why not do nothing. The mind and the feelings, before you start doing - that's the most difficult thing. A sort of a depression beforehand. I know it very well.

...

12.05.23
STRATEGIES & PRACTICAL
PROBLEMS

ANDREAS: We always get feedback that nobody knows about us. Our strategies this year: we do more in the city. Now we have performances in the library, in front of the library, in two supermarkets, on an island. Our guest-artist from Belgrade, she found this island, Saltholm, on an online map. She asked: "what about this island?" So now she will perform there. This decision creates so many problems for us. On the island there is nature protection, no drinking water, it's expensive to get there. I am very curious how it will work. And in the festival, we have a lot of practical problems: infrastructure, technical, human resources.

MARIJANA: You cannot avoid that, otherwise it would be too easy.

ANDREAS: If everything only went smoothly, we would jump to the next level.

19.06.23
CULTURAL POLITICS

ANDREAS: What is the right of artmakers in a public context, in an institutional context? What can they expect from cultural politics, what can't they expect? What to advocate for? What can I ask for, what can I try to seduce people into, what is my right - not personal.

MARIJANA: Andreas, you mentioned before that you will have meetings with the policy makers. It is relevant to bring up the question - what cultural activities, be it indoors or outdoors, in the public space, inside cultural centres, art centres in the public space outside; what does it really mean for these decision makers? Do they support it automatically because they have to? Because somebody said that they have to do it? Do they have any thoughts on it? The politicians stopped thinking about it: this has to be done or I have to tick this box, and that's it. Do they have any professional reflections: why do this, who does it serve, what kind of forms does it take, what does it tell our citizens? Do they see art as just fun and part of leisure time, or do they see it a learning opportunity, a community-building opportunity, or any kind of opportunity, where you learn from others about their own concerns, their own needs?

I think the policy makers have to be engaged in this thinking as well, they cannot just think “I reckon it is important for my image, I have to do it, I have to spend money.” That is not enough especially if they deal with cultural affairs. They need to find a way to engage themselves as well.

ANDREAS: Until now, I have not managed to talk with the responsible people about these subjects. I had some failed attempts some years ago with politicians, where I wanted to engage with them in a collaboration but not on finances - dialogue, infrastructure. They refused. A friend of mine said it is impossible for the politicians to say yes to such a proposal. They want to decide where the money goes, but they don't want to be involved in the more detailed processes of a project. The funding structure in the municipality is like this: “culture and leisure” supports associations' activities like sports or minor cultural activities. Then, there is a small amount of funding for independent projects that you can apply for, they have very little money; in the last round, where we did not get funding, they had €3,000 to distribute. That's it. But now I feel that it is necessary that they are involved in discussions. I only get weird messages of “yes” and “no”, or “we have decided

this and that.” But so far it was not possible to have a talk about content. I was maybe not really ready for it. As a foreigner I need a lot of time to create a space where I feel strong enough. If I came with a mindset which was prepared for a good discussion, maybe they would like it because they are really improvising on a very low level.

MARIJANA: Exactly, that is the right term: improvisation. They improvise, because they calculate all the time. They calculate about their own political position, trying to avoid any potential situation that might be a trap. That's a problem. If they are civil servants for a while, it is about the public interest and not their political party. That's the trap. How to propose a platform for discussion where they will feel safe... STORM: ... and where they feel like they can succeed. A lot of them also feel insecure about certain parts of it. Arts and culture are not their main priority, where they feel comfortable, so they improvise, shut down because of their own insecurity, their interest, their image, relying on what you have already created.

17.08.23 MONEY & SCARCITY / FRIDGE TORTURE

ANNETT: I have to check the financial situation of Vierte Welt to see how far we can go. And yesterday I had a talk to the senate (the authorities): they really want to help. But the meeting with them went the same way again... - I really don't know if I want to do this kind of work any longer. They invent more and more rules. I have been dealing with these rules now for more than 12 years. But yesterday I needed to explain to the nice lady why I needed a kettle. I said: “Are you kidding me? You give me this small amount of money and want me to justify buying a kettle?” Or they ask: “Why did you buy a new fridge? The venue has nothing to do with fridges.” I said: “Are you kidding me?” I spent two hours explaining that we needed to buy a new fridge. This is not creative, it is just stupid bureaucracy... It steals time. It is so important to help the artists do what they want to do. MARIJANA: It is a kind of torture. “We give you money but then we tell you how to spend it”. “We keep our eyes on you for such ridiculous little details”. It's offensive as well. Then you don't have time to ask them how they spend their own money. “How do you

spend the money that is given to you? It is also my money, it is public money. How much money do you spend to buy weapons?” You have no time to ask these questions. But you need to find a creative way to buy a fridge.

...

06.12.23 SPACE

ANDREAS: For me, to have a space as an institution is so important, because the artist-community is already so precarious and not really a community. We cannot say we work in a common direction. Everybody is so scattered, has their own problems with finance and survival. I cannot start without space and claim “We are strong enough as a community to survive.” I feel the space is an anchor for people. I would never give up a space just like that. There must be very good reasons. For my practice, it is absolutely crucial to have a space. Denmark is too cold to have no space, it is also a matter of climate.

09.01.24

PERMANENT FUNDRAISING

MARIJANA: The good and stable thing is that we have four European projects, which means we have support for 3-4 years, it is all expiring mostly next year - 2024. This gives us the stability - money for salaries, more activities, engage more people from the scene. Regarding the local funding: it is very scarce, that is why we are protesting. It is very difficult. They don't have structural grants at all. Everything is based on projects that end every year. They don't evaluate the work at all in order to see or understand the scope of the work that is done by each organisation. Then, they have to give us the part of the co-financing for the European projects, it's their obligation. But you never know how much they give you for your co-financing part, how they will deal with this. It happened to our colleagues: some were refused because there was a partner from Kosovo! So they automatically kick the project out from the funding. It is very insecure, precarious, so, we are good because of these European projects. But then, it's always temporary. We are permanently fundraising.

18.01.24

NOMAD DANCE ACADEMY POLITICS

MARIJANA: We did several so-called advocacy events, where we wanted to advocate for different policies for dance and cultural collaborations. We had realised that the only way to succeed in reaching the politicians and decision makers, who will then take the concrete steps, is to involve them in a way which is not the typical and usual way of meeting, where we sit and complain to each other and everybody has arguments, and then we all leave and continue to do things in the same way. Instead we make the policy makers participate in activities to engage them not only in a representative role, as politicians and decision makers but also to involve their bodies, their imagination, their creative sides, their affects and emotions. We do this by creating an environment with small dance classes, talks, where the artists speak informally about what is behind their artistic work, how they cope as single mothers, for example, how they organise their life in order to get and produce the artworks. These kind of things, which are part of our work, part of the whole cultural work in all its aspects. We work actively with the fact that these people make

decisions about how we can work. The idea is that the decision makers also experience our work and have it in mind as human beings, as neighbours, as collaborators, etc. This experience of the advocacy events usually makes them put away their mask of representation, get away from their institutional role. It addresses them as humans with whom you then can sit and talk. Then this human will understand differently what you are talking about, what you are pointing to and so on. And it works! We did it for the first time in 2012. Then we built these local politician advocates. And after these events people from the administration became our advocates: people that really know what we are talking about, how we work, and where we are heading. That's really precious. Whether we do a festival or create an environment around the artistic practice: it is very important, this understanding of the gatherings that we create. It comes from our experience in this region with the Nomad network.

15.03.23

GENTRIFICATION

STORM: There is also something - a point about gentrification - art institutions and gentrification - which I find is a big question, in regards to Tårnby Park Studio (TPS) as well. I lived in New York for a while and LA. There is a strong awareness of that. Art institutions are often a first step to gentrify an area. Some of TPS' work is, in a way, to talk, challenge, strategise around this. How do we have an art institution in that area, the outskirts of Copenhagen, saying I am not coming from the outside, putting some alien objects into the neighbourhood, I am not an agent of gentrification, I am working from within.

ANDREAS: What you are saying is: often art projects work as a first attractor of gentrification, which you describe as something that is planned from the outside, make an area more a brand than a living area, attracting more hip, young white people. Cities want to clean up different areas with art... this is pretty generalised.

MARIJANA: That is exactly how it works. The process of gentrification: hip cultural activities. Music clubs. Bars, and then it goes, the renovation of public spaces, I have seen it all around, making places more visible, all these ways of cleaning the places up.

STORM: It can be a starting point to speak with the politicians – to say "my practice does not go along with this. We work with an accountability and an awareness". And what effect gentrification has, how it is a part of this large machine that we see rolling over the cities.

ANDREAS: There is also a moment of gentrification that you really cannot control. TPS has the intention to involve people's voices, people's needs, ideas, people's stories. Let's say we could get a bigger space, lots of funding and staff. There is an effect you cannot control, you might attract the next business, then the next club. Is there a way we could prevent this?

STORM: By being accountable. For Batida theatre in Nordvest, this is the model. They continue to offer free theatre for youth, and I think it is their model to try not to . Their response is to give back and offer free access. They invest more to be able to be at the library as well, for example. You already have as a model TPS and the festival that is already a different model to "let's pretend there is nothing here" - and just being part of the crowd. You already have a practice that is countering it, you already have the tools for making relations, what you have been making from the beginning, you have a loving

relationship with the cleaning staff. You have this level of respect. That is the problem with gentrification, the people who live there disappear, they are unimportant and the place only attracts people from the outside. In terms of the discussion with the politicians that is maybe a part of it - where is the area going?

ANDREAS: What are the ideas for the future of this place? Now, for example, the municipality has a very strong strategy, making changes to how energy works, how water works. There should definitely be a question of what the role of culture is for this transformation. Is there a role for culture in this transformation? Culture can be one of the tools to achieve these transformations...

MARIJANA: It is very important that we are speaking from the lived experience, from the knowledge that we gained through the specific process, not from the complete outside. And I think you have a very solid basis to speak to that from your experience. You have to use this position.

12.05.23 THE DANCE SCHOOL OF LIA RODRIGUES

MARIJANA: I'm busy right now with the thoughts that came after my visit to Brazil. I came back like, maybe three weeks ago from Brazil, where I spent some 16 days. And the first week of this trip was actually the visit to the largest favela of Rio de Janeiro, Maré and the dance school of Lia Rodrigues. And the things I've seen there, that I witnessed, and the people I met are still with me. This experience is still very strong because I saw an example of real democracy. I saw examples of how a democratic society gets created out of the needs of people, out of the needs of the community, and then also how arts or actually dance gets integrated into all these processes, what it brings, what it takes, how it manages to take many, many important layers of this society, such as race, history, politics, economy, social relations, political relations, and so on and so on, how it all comes out through dance, on the bodies of these people that live there and that work there and that are produced there. It was an amazing thing to see, amazing people to meet. And it was such a lesson for me and for my colleagues that were with me from other parts of Europe. But for me, it was also an example of the practice that I found very close to me, like how a group of people, smaller, larger, it doesn't matter, out of necessity, starts to think about the need to be together, to work together, and to create the whole system which will help everybody to survive or to live at least a little bit better. And what is the role of the arts in all this? This visit was part of one European travel project, this APAP feminist future network. It's a European project. 140,000 people live in this favela. So, it's part of the city. It's somehow in the middle of the city, but at the same time, it's completely forgotten or kicked out by the system. So, it's like an informal kind of place, which has been... and its population has been neglected by the system for, like, hundreds of years. It's the places where very poor people, mostly of African origin, started to build their places to live and were not under any control or protection of the state. At the same time, it was the place where criminal groups started to organise their work. And in some very strange ways, these criminal groups and these cities, let's say this population, have created very strange kind of links. On one side, the population depends on these criminal groups,

these militias and mafia groups and so on, because they protect them. On the other side, they are also being abused and used by these criminal groups because these places for hiding, for organising the different criminal activities, like drug dealing, arms dealing, you know, like all this. Then they are also very often the sources of money for the criminal groups. And because these criminal groups are in permanent conflict with the police, with the official police, at least once per month there are huge police raids on the favela. And of course, this results in casualties. A lot of dead people, many, many more dead people from this population than from the criminal groups. So when the favela community opens, the question of how to get integrated into the broader society and how to get certain rights fulfilled and certain services provided by the state, then it immediately raises the problem between the criminal groups and the state. And then, you know, it becomes like a kind of, you know, closed circle without an exit for these people who live there - when they want to communicate with the state, then the criminal groups intervene because they don't want that. They want to keep this territory as their own, the territory that only they control. And this is one side of the problem. The other side of the problem comes from how these cities, these neighbourhoods are organised. They are not slums. That's very important. They always repeat it. They are really self-organised, meaning that they created proper, let's say, urban structures, with streets, with houses, with shops, with electricity and water in houses, and so on and so on. So, it's like all organised, but self-organised. Actually, it's them who provide this kind of infrastructure. Then there are not many proper services, for example, like proper schooling, proper health care, proper, I don't know, other kinds of social services. And that's why they have these networks, these civil, let's say civil kind of initiatives that have grown with time and that have developed this network of support. So, what they did, this is the most, this is the core of their work, like they decided altogether. So, it's like a consensus of the society around four main focuses, four main basic needs in this moment that they want to work on all together, so that everybody contributes the way they can. So, these are education, which means that they support young people from the favela to prepare for the final exam in order to be able to go to university, because ten years ago, only 1% of all students in Brazil were black, while at the same time, the population is more than 50% black. So the favela network supports the kids, young people, to pass the final exam in secondary school in order to be able to go to

university. And then they significantly raised the number of young people from the favela who go to university now. So, it's like a big, big thing for them. These educated people come back or stay in the favela and work in the favela on different activities and projects. So, another focus is something that they call arts, culture, archive and memory, which is related to the need to preserve the memory of their African culture, African origins, because this was systematically erased by the official system of education, school culture, and so on. And then, of course, all kinds of artistic and cultural activities. They have libraries, libraries for kids, the dance school, exhibition spaces, research spaces, a lot of things. Then the third focus is what they call damage control, which is related to violence, because violence is part of their life. Violence is a big, big issue, but they cannot easily resolve the question of the source of violence. But what they can do is control the damage. So, they try to empower, to educate people about how to take care when the violent raids occur, how to protect themselves, how to protect their families, how to, you know, how to deal with this situation of violence in the best possible way, to protect lives and so on. And then the fourth element, or focus, is health support, which they developed because there is no health system that they have access to. And then it's organised in a way to provide some kind of basic or urgent health support, like, for example, support for old people, support for drug addicts. It's a big thing, again, like this network of support of taking care of these people, helping them to get rid of the addiction, of finding them jobs, of educating them, and so on. And then, of course, it was a big thing when there was the pandemic three years ago, it was completely, selforganised, because the state then with Bolsonaro, had anti-vaccine kind of politics. And then the favela people managed to get vaccines. And in the first, like, I don't know, maybe ten days of the first vaccinations, they managed to vaccinate 70% of the favela population, just like, reaching people and, you know, like talking with them. And it was a big thing because they couldn't allow the virus to spread virulently in the favela, because it would have been totally, like, devastating. And so then you see how the whole community gets organised and participates in working on these commonly decided joint shared priorities. And this is amazing. This is really, like, wow! And everybody whom we met from, like, dance people, library women, they have something like the house of women that also supports women in many different ways, because it's a

highly patriarchal society. So, they support young women, older women, like, you know, so people there, women there, in all these different places in the network where they work on different things. Everybody who spoke with us spoke so articulately about, you know, the reasons why they do it, how they do it, for what purposes, with what goals. It was amazing. Like, these people spoke, like, you know, like academics, like, in that way, clear and understanding the context in which they work, they live, and understanding all the factors that influence their life, their environment. It was, like, really, really amazing. And then in the middle of all that, we had this dance school, you know, and this Lia Rodrigues and this crazy project that she created, like, the school is there to bring the kids off the street and to give them an opportunity to have a different life, a different career, different chances in life. They come there. So the classes happen every day. It's open. But then she has also a proper school for dancers. And the people who are in this school, they are paid. They have monthly payments in order to really commit, to be there, to be able to live of this, to help their families. And then after they finish the school, they work with Lia in her company, or they go to, I don't know, different companies around the world, because they are amazing dancers, and they are totally, totally rooted in the favela culture. They don't, at least, I couldn't see that they dream about, you know, going into the world, like, to some other place.

19.06.2023 INSTITUTION AS DEVELOPMENT SPACE

ANDREAS: We had this festival in the last 10 days, for the first time it also took place outside the park. There was a dance piece in two supermarkets, a performative installation close to the library for four days, some activities in the streets, the festival in the park itself. This year there was a special quality of... this year, I understood from practice: it really is a space for development. It helps the independent scene to develop. The artists who work here, they would not do the same somewhere else. That is kind of the reward as we cannot pay much, but we provide space, we provide artistic support, and also an audience, and that is beautiful.

MARIJANA: The experience of the festival in the park, this amazing environment is striking: the once-upon-a-time working-class neighbourhood, and the absence of any sign of life. Everything looks quite clean and quiet. You don't see people filling this public space, this park - besides some parents with little kids. Without the activities of the festival, you really don't see that there are people living there, who spend some time outside, and have some specific interests and the quality of being in these public spaces, that's why I find this festival super important,

it brings this invitation to the public space for these people to come out, to join proposals for what they want, to join activities that you propose, giving life to the public space. And the festival as far as I could see, that I attended, was really made to be inviting, in a very nice subtle, inviting and welcoming way, so there was nothing that was imposed, like elite culture that is brought to some parts of the city, a rather nice, fun, caring, inviting combination of artistic proposals, also social proposals, having this blend of artistic work of eating together, small activities, informal chat, small activities for children and adults, having painting and dance classes, music, really wonderful, the kind of programme in the public space which I definitely prefer, because, it is made in such a way as to be truly a proposition. We propose this, because we want you to come to us, to participate, to say what you want, like, what you want to contribute. And then of course, in the background is the question: okay, we are trying something, but we want to really think about it, want to learn from it - what can this mean in this specific context, this question of institutions - what are they, what is their role, how are they shaped?

17.08.23 MAKING A FESTIVAL, CREATING A FIELD

STORM: I am actually sitting on a text right now. I am working with this dance festival here in Copenhagen. I work as the dramaturge, there are two curators. The festival should be seen as an art piece in itself. They invited me to do an intervention at the festival. I will give a speech. I write about my work: what it means to curate. About the relation between curating and caring and carrying. When they decide to curate something, who are they when they are making the choices, who are their collaborators. The curators have a strong sense of care. When you care for someone, do you also decide what is good for them? Love and affection and power. Someone is caring and someone is being cared for. When is Tårnby caring for you and when are you caring for Tårnby? What is the relation between the people coming and investing in the people. And when are they caring for the festival by showing up and when is the festival carrying them? How to show accountability? The two curators of that festival are giving a sort of manifesto at the beginning. They made their process really transparent: these are the choices we made, this is what

happened. They make the process of making the festival a part of the festival... What they want is to show the problem of power, to make decisions, to start a discussion on this. And present this as a new way of curating. Care has been at the very forefront: the communication with the artists, what they can afford in terms of time and money. They are in collaboration. They try to insist on not doing it right and effectively, spending their time in other ways, so they spend much more time talking with the artists, much more time situating themselves, making their role specific, their practice transparent. That takes a lot of time and is in contradiction with what the big institutions they work with do.

...

17.08.23 BRANDING

STORM: So many of our meetings in the preparation of this dance festival were about the fear of doing something wrong. What if people think it is not good? Representation. Say something bad. Like different parameters of different institutions. This pressure about a certain schedule they are presenting at the festival which the Big Institution was really pushing. This machine: we

want you because you have a creative curatorial practice but it cannot be so messy, you have to deliver!

ANDREAS: It is also funny about this Big Institution. This thing of pushing names. In the advertisement for the event the curators' names always appeared first. That's how it was framed: "A festival as a performance". For my festival, I would never say, "read this, it is by Andreas Liebmann, read the name." STORM: The Big Institution's advertisement was really pushing the names. But the artists really did not want to do that. That is how the PR system is. It has this strategy of branding. The Big Institution just said "This is how it works".

ANDREAS: Vierte Welt is never branded as Cieslak Hardegen. It is just Vierte Welt .

ANNETT: That was the idea, to erase ourselves

...

17.08.23 MESSYNESS

ANDREAS: You emphasised the value of "messyness". Messy, messy what does it mean?

STORM: I think as an image, messyness was an effort to think about: what is all the stuff, when you curate the festival. It's unpredictable. Things that are hard to put numbers on, affects.

The Tårnby Park Performance Festival - this togetherness is unique. By naming it "messyness" I try to find a language for it. Messyness - all the stuff that spills out. All the stuff that is hard to grasp, or that does not fit the programme line-up. There is a tendency to think of curating as a result of just putting the pieces of a puzzle together. What about all the things that don't fit? What about if a piece goes into another piece. Disruption, something unpredictable? I am interested in the messy part, not necessarily in the clean part. Andreas' practice is much more messy. There is this community. There is an accountability to the mess. I put myself in a community that is already a community. But it will not be a mess if you close your eyes and pretend: I am here, there was nothing before me, I am an isolated island. Very gentrifying. My practice is situated. And it is in context, it is in conversation. Then it starts to be in contact. There has been a history.

17.08.23 TO SELL OR TO SHARE

MARIJANA: I totally disagree with parts of the logic that comes from this idea of control by the artistic institution: “We want to create a new format, but now it cannot be messy”.

ANNETT: If I share, I also have the opportunity to invite people to join. If I am going to sell something it is “Take it or leave it”.
ANDREAS: Sharing could be inviting other people to join, but it could also be sharing something by showing it.

MARIJANA: Showing something, and sharing knowledge. Telling a story is also sharing. The other thing is selling. When you sell a performance it could be selling the product by buying a ticket. But you can also in some situations sell the tickets, not in order to sell the product, but to invite the participants to contribute a little bit to the fee of the artist. Inviting people to contribute, and not really to buy an experience. Of course, sometimes it is necessary to sell the tickets. It depends of how to put this into a discourse, do you really sell it as a product? That is why I think it is important to stress the sharing element. How can we communicate it in a better way instead of how we will sell it.

ANDREAS: How do you do it, Annett?

ANNETT: We have a website. Prices for the events. Different prices for the different events. We talk to the artists. They can also decide how much it should be. But we have a kind of a standard. Before summer, we had a drag show. They wanted to communicate that the money goes completely to the people that do the show. They wanted €12, or €16, which is a lot for our venue. Normally we have three prices. Almost everyone bought the higher price. It was fun but also pressuring the people a bit, “Everything goes to the artist”. Sometimes we have small formats which don’t even fit the “one hour-thing”. The question is always: should we ask for money or not? For discourse stuff we don’t generally ask for money. Now we have inflation. Everything is more expensive and people need to earn more money. It will be even more difficult now in the autumn or next season. We always discuss anew how we will do it. We have some standards but they are not fixed. I always try to understand what is the best solution in the specific case. Some of the institutions will collapse. It will be so difficult.

06.12.23 SHARING THE SPACE WHEN EVERYONE IS STRUGGLING SO MUCH

ANDREAS: Annett, is it correct that there is this wish for a more collective structure and in the end it is just the two of you carrying your institution? In the end you are the servant of the groups. They behave as if you were a normal institution. You give them what they need and then they do what they want! Your wish would be to share more, to be more intertwined.

ANNETT: It is a kind of a development: in the beginning there was a different plan or there was no plan at all. We tried to have this place outside the theatre. Then we tried to have the collaboration thing and to share the space. That did not work at all because of the money thing. Nobody else got the money, we got the money. We tried at least to offer alternative production conditions. The procedure would not only be to say “it depends on your cool idea and then you can do whatever you want”. Our place is different to other venues because the artists get so much more free space to follow their artistic interest. I guess they get more individual help from our side, but it is not a collaborative way of working. Because the structure is so precarious, nobody can really earn

money out of it. People cannot put so much time in so people cannot really commit: then it is difficult to invent something that is stable, if there are always two people there and the others just join when possible. You cannot share it all in the same way. You are not a collective, you cannot share everything in the same way. Others join it in different periods. This creates a sort of hierarchy.

ANDREAS: Which is not necessarily bad.

ANNETT: No, it is just a fact. Now we have money for the next season. Next year we have this new government, need to see what the new CDU government does. A new minister for culture, a different situation starting next year. It would be fantastic if there would be more young people involved. We need different perspectives of young people coming from very different backgrounds. In that sense I am really lucky to work with a lot of young people here.

ANDREAS: The topic of generations is very important in terms of institutionalisation. You easily become this old authority and everyone looks up to you. That is not comfortable.

ANNETT: If you work with people who are 27 there is a difference you cannot ignore. How they think, how they work, different mood, mentality, very interesting.

18.01.24 SURVIVAL AND RESISTING

ANNETT: It is very difficult to survive, if you work in this very tiny “in-between everything”.

MARIJANA: The idea of stability, to survive: This term has not been mentioned so far, survival. Nomad survived because of an enormous network, practices of solidarity. Nomad is a kind of, is this liberated space, resisting these forces that try to push you to do things in a certain way.

ANNETT: Maybe this is a better word, resistance. Survive... it is also a bit dramatic to survive.

...

15.03.23 TÅRNBY CULTURAL POLITICS

STORM: Tårnby is not... Nordvest. What you have created in Tårnby is unique to Copenhagen. It is not like Nordvest used to be as a suburb. There is also a theatre, it is unique in its own terms: kids' theatre. Now they managed to get a bit of support for the model of free children's theatre. They got a lot of funding, because there is interest from the municipality. Taking support away from the inner-city theatres. And I think you have proved something very unique, not only in Tårnby. A unique

model, not just creating something and checking it out. A chance to continue a journey, inspired internationally, from other institutions that have a similar way of working. There is nothing else like this. Now we get a theatre and then what? Your practice does not belong in a traditional theatre.

MARIJANA: You have to present it as a benchmark for Tårnby. The specific thing that only Tårnby has. To also make it as their kind of success in a way. They had recognised it, they have supported it, but then it needs to develop. In a way which will show what the people from Tårnby really want.

...

12.05.23 WHAT IS MY RIGHT?

MARIJANA: If you ask, what is your right as a culture maker, you can always start from the real situation. You can use the festival and the relation between the neighbourhoods at the festival and the public activities as a starting point for the discussions with the politicians. In Tårnby there is this beautiful neighbourhood, with a lot of public space which is meant to be connected with culture.

19.06.23 CREATING A FIELD

ANDREAS: What I experienced in the festival this year, it feels so clear: the way our team collaborated was felt by the visitors of the festival. We created a field of a certain way of relating to each other that spread. The ways we interact in the core with each other creates another space that the people immediately feel. When you say these curators spend a lot of time with the artists to prepare the dance festival, I would be curious: how does it feel for people that enter the space not knowing anything about these processes, because I am sure it will create something people will understand physically through their body.

STORM: The fear is that if you spend your time in another way that scores no points on a checklist, it is not productive – in the ways that you are required to be productive. They insist on doing some work that does not read as being productive, tick boxes, sell tickets, the fear that appears when we try to do things in different ways.

ANDREAS: What are the notions of success? I also have ideas of success - if nobody comes it feels unsuccessful, or if the next piece does not work - this mindset, this fear is part of the process. Let's say “yes to the fear”. It is very strange how we

easily internalise somebody else's criteria or patterns of how to do things or think about things.

MARIJANA: Like these relations you mention with your team, it is so visible in the structure and in the production of the festival, that people are embodying it. That is extremely important, they build their relation to the festival with this element in it... not only the performances, not the precise agenda, not the number of audiences. These feelings/experiences of specific relations among the people who are there. So, your fear - if we can use that word - should only relate to this: how to build good relations, with all the people that are involved, and not how many people, how many journalists came. This is what builds this body that people really feel at the end. That people take the experience with them at the end... not all festivals should be about audience numbers, some are there to build relations, to be the real experience that stays with people. It is exactly like the topic of care that is at the essence of it. How we care for those around us, no matter how many they are. That's what makes a difference.

ANDREAS: And I think that there the festival is a performance in itself, like these dance curator artists say: they want the festival to be an artwork in itself,

that is also what I learn from you, Storm. The performance is what it does to people, that is the performance, and if you think of a festival like this, then the festival does not only represent a certain idea of art that you can see and then criticise but it also creates a space, it creates relations and therefore if you can see that, it is not a stupid idea to say, “it is also an art piece”. It is very concrete, it is about a rhythm, relations, about the quality of... and so on.

...

17.08.23 UNPREDICTABILITY

MARIJANA: It is very important to take into account the unpredictable elements of a gathering. The system is pushing us to control everything, predict everything. To foresee everything, every possible element - and then to report it. When you speak about the festival in this Big Art Institution, they say, “You have to do things like this”. It is a huge obstacle. Very problematic. “Things have to be like this”. Super problematic: if there is a PR team that says how you should do certain things. For me it is totally opposite of how things should work in an art place. It is not that PR tells me what to do. And how things should be framed. The artistic work

should say to the PR people what to say, how to do it, how to make it, how to communicate it better. These things say a lot about this institutional mainstream system. The ways it works. The laws it accepts and uses to function. This messy, unpredictable, surprising place is being cleaned up. Removed.

ANDREAS: But I think it has so much to do with the fact that that stuff is hard to sell.

MARIJANA: To sell or to share...



"Øko-Sci Fi" by Fremtidsklubben (Stjerne i natten), © Andreas Liebmann

Autonomy

Dirk Cieslak, *Vierte Welt*

Today's artists are usually highly educated and qualified. They speak three languages. They are professional and have several masters degrees on their CVs. I didn't go through that tough school. The guards wouldn't have let me into those academies. I wouldn't have been able to show the portfolio that proves talent and that is so important to cross the first hurdle on the way to becoming an artist. I am an artist without a diploma. Self-taught. The only six-week workshop I ever attended was the training I received as a rocket munitions technician during my military service.

Thanks to an illustrious reform policy in the 1970s, I was allowed to enter the university as a working-class child through the gates that had previously been well-guarded by the bourgeoisie.

A wonderful *laissez-faire* atmosphere prevailed, much to the dismay and horror of many. After I got a first class degree in social sciences, a lecturer I held in high esteem said I had made the best of my abilities. The word "limited" before "abilities" was implicit and only resonated. She was right. I was not talented. I was neither a good student nor a good skilled worker. I only had a very early developed determination to escape the madness of my parental home, through which the still fresh traumas of the war were powerfully striking in their capers. My will had no language. It was only a pictureless longing. It was an empty will not to accept the swelling depression. I wanted to leave behind the lack and the silent unhappiness in which I was trapped, the speechlessness that separated me from the world. I did not want to accept this dark, insurmountable wall that surrounded me. It was built of inhibitions and inauthenticity. I felt wrong. But I wanted to understand the world. I wanted to enter into an active relationship with the world. The real world that I was thrown into held, at best, a secure job in the public sector, salary scale 7, for someone like me who couldn't even put a comma in the right place. My determination did not lead to an existential act, as Jean Paul Sartre describes it for Jean Genet. The foster father calls out to Genet: "You are a thief," and the child Genet replies: "Yes, I am a thief," thereby justifying his existence and, if you like, his identity. I never said yes to the identity or identities that were called out to me. I refused to be part of the debt economy of self-assurance that revolves around itself. I am not guilty. My determination to establish an active, living connection with the

world, to overcome the oppressive inhibitions and inauthenticities that characterised me, and to find a language only worked by entering into a productive relationship with a counterpart. These productive relationships are autonomous. They are diverse, they are singular and often temporary. They exist or existed out of themselves. The world is their material. They arise from chance, which invites us to say yes.

Social spaces are needed for these autonomous relationships of the first order. I speak of autonomy of the first order to distinguish it from the autonomy of the second order, which is conferred or awarded to the artist by the institutions and their discourses after an artistic education. This space of autonomy is infinite and unspecific until it crystallises into a work at a particular place. How can such a place be described? It is a place where it is tacitly taken for granted that one is there and working. Where one meets at eye level despite all the adversities and contradictions. Without instruments of mediation. A place where the artist does not have to explain himself. A place where the artist does not have to insist on his rights (or put himself in this situation). A place that lives by the rule of live and let live. Admittedly, it is difficult to maintain a space of first-order autonomy in a place. You have to create, assert and invent these places. Sometimes you can only hallucinate about them. I know such places. I have fought for them again and again and created them for myself in one way or another. In times of restoration, it has not become any easier to assert them. Sometimes I just blanked out enough to believe that I was in such a place. There were historical coincidences, such as the dissolution of the GDR, when places for this first-order autonomy fell into one's lap, so to speak. And then at some point they were taken away again. Then the well-trained professionals came in the guise of curators or artistic directors and established a third-order regime, the programme. The autonomy of the second order overwrites the autonomy of the first order.



"Airport in pieces", Tårnby Park Studio 2023, ©Max Morris Doherty



it was never about equality; it was about having a place

Annett Hardegen, Vierte Welt

VIERTE WELT opened on 5 November 2010 at Kottbusser Tor with the double project: DAS HEIM: 1. Women and children first and 2. Let me be your dog.

Both parts of DAS HEIM combined to create an evening of theatre. It engaged in a dialogue about the state of our present. DAS HEIM was a place where refugees, the poor, activists, children, tortured dogs, women and dog lovers could live, work and receive guests.

Early summer 2024; more than ten years have passed.

When we opened Vierte Welt, we wanted to create an evening of theatre outside the institution theatre and work with other artists to connect in a joint work. DAS HEIM was a collaboration between the Lubricat theatre company, Maiden Monsters, and Gutes Tun.

The Berliner Zeitung wrote: "Out of the cloud of consensus ... It is a defenceless training in the existential leap from thinking to playing to doing, which is at the same time so openly designed here that it has never been more stimulating for the audience to jump along."

During DAS HEIM, we decided to stay at the "Kotti". We didn't want to go back to the institution theatre. Over the past few years, we have



worked on the following issues, in particular with Vierte Welt:

1. How does a space emerge as the-
2. What are the mechanics and consequences of neoliberal politics and economics on our culture and society?

atre space that moves outside the institution of theatre, and how can this space enable work in continuity?

3. How do power and representation behave in our society, and in what spaces (in the broadest sense) can we oppose this?

While we moved away from the established theatre spaces back then, the Vierte Welt has become an established space through its many years of existence alone. And we still see ourselves as a space for thought/action/art that is not affirmative, which rather, despite and with all the entanglements in a market and competitive structure, creates an in-between space, a gap, and tries to protect it with all kinds of practices. And so today, as then, one of our central questions is: how can we design a space that we share, a public space, a space for thinking, a space for the new, the untried?

In 2017, we made a significant shift in our approach. We decided to distance ourselves from the concept of collaboration, which was integral to our inception,

by removing the word from our name. Inspired by our friend Boyan Manchev, we recognised this as yet another form of performative capitalism in the neoliberal era, where artistic subjectivity is tied to labour and the market. We established the Vierte Welt in order to escape the modes of production and exploitation of neoliberalism as far as possible, by inventing counter ...



In 2010, we founded the theatre and event venue Vierte Welt in the centre of Berlin, in the new building Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum (NKZ) at Kottbusser Tor. Vierte Welt is located in the gallery of the NKZ in a gutted shop. We deliberately chose this location, outside of a protected theatre and art scene, on the social edge of the city, and in its geographical centre. The location does not define itself as underground, in the shadow of the cool scene. The NKZ is synonymous with an urban planning and socio-political scandal. Here and at the Kotti brutalisation and crime are constantly present. At the same time, the Kotti is one of the city's most urban and heterogeneous places.



As a place where artistic work has been carried out since 2010, we have been asking questions such as:

How does a space for theatre emerge that moves outside the institution of theatre?

How can continuity be made possible for this work in a precarious location like ours?

What are the mechanics and consequences of neoliberal policies and economies in our culture and society?

How can we undermine them? What forms of representation generate power structures and in what spaces (in the broadest sense) can we oppose them?

Vierte Welt sees itself as a production space in which artistic work is understood as an integrated social production context. We are a space of thought/action/art that, despite all the entanglements in market and competitive structures, creates an intermediate space and tries to protect it with all possible practices. We see it as our task to create a place that is a public and accessible space, a space for thinking, for new forms, for the artistically untried. Our aim is to perforate boundaries and divisions; to open up enclosures and offer paths of connection. In this sense, we understand Vierte Welt as a technique of appropriation and rupture and we claim these techniques as the basis of committed political theatre work. The basis of our work is a significant art-political agenda at the boundary of art, politics and philosophy. Since its beginnings, Vierte Welt has been dedicated to the exploration and practice of hospitality.

We understand hospitality as a counter-technique to the economisation of all aspects of life.



First attempt: we build a room in the theatre, the theatre, the theatre space disappears

Second attempt: WE LEAVE THE THEATRE And open a room

And so we understand our work as a WITH consisting of many artists, and this WITH eludes a curatorial practice but connects all the more with an actual working practice and the artists themselves.

Vierte Welt still wants to connect people, artists, activists and everyone else. Vierte Welt also strives for a practice of solidarity in art. And seeks a self-presentation of diversity. Vierte Welt is a place for an art policy and practice that raises questions and in which philosophy, politics, actionism, art and theatre intermingle.

Third attempt: we give up our name and look for a name * part of this name is the word collaboration

Derrida: Liberalisation is therefore accompanied by a restriction of hospitality.

Politics of the dream - a politics that keeps alive the possibility of the impossible against the hegemony of globalisation,

the phantoms of indivisible sovereignty, and the collective narcissism of national identities.

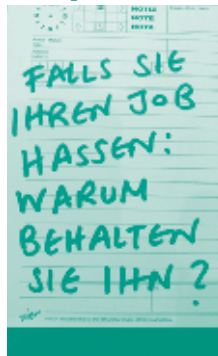
Fourth attempt: we remove the word collaboration

The location itself

Since 2018, we have had a 70-square-metre studio in addition to the large 120-square-metre space. Our office is located between the two rooms which are located in the gallery of Zentrum Kreuzberg and which were originally a doctor's practice and then a Turkish cultural centre.

The entire space, organisation, administration and operations were run on a voluntary basis until 2014. Since 2015, we have received venue funding which is now biennial and has been continuously increased until 2023. Among other things, this funding has enabled us to set up three quarter-time positions for the organisation and supervision of evening events. The management was previously run on a voluntary basis and has only been implemented in two half-time positions since 2020. However, these positions are paid when possible.

The Vierte Welt can hold between 35 and 70 spectators for theatre productions, depending on how it is used. For all other events (readings, discussions), we can accommodate up to 99 people. The studio can hold up to 50 spectators.



Anne Dufourmantelle: Invitation

Jan Patočka argued in favour of an “openness to the shocking”, which requires us to “go through the experience of the loss of meaning” because it is from this that “the authenticity of philosophical thought” emerges. Against this background, Jacques Derrida recognises in Patočka's experiences on the front during the First World War that the concept of hospitality has been pushed to its extreme limits. For in the experience at the front, the enemy is no longer simply the enemy. He becomes “our partner in the shock of the day [...]. This is where the abysmal nature of ‘prayer for the enemy’ opens up, the phenomenon of ‘love for those who hate us’ - the solidarity of the shaken”.

Perhaps the question (of) hospitality is ‘a provocation of thought itself’ and ultimately ‘only those who accept the experience of being deprived of [their] home can grant hospitality’.

**hX-th attempt:
we take the
word hospi-
tality and try
to apply it as a
practice in our
spaces**

**Another at-
tempt: we use
philosophy and
hospitality**

.....
2024: we
receive fund-
ing from the

GIB MIR DIE ANGST ZURÜCK

(gefördert durch den Hauptstadtkulturfonds)

KO

Capital Cultural Fund for a new work with the title NIE WIEDER EIGENTUM. It asks the question: can a social order beyond property and social contract be possible? Western societies are generally based on social contracts: individual freedom is exchanged for protection. We abide by laws (and give up freedom) and, in return, expect protection from state institutions, in the form of social security systems, economic stability, etc.

Culture is a common good, something that should belong to everyone, an endeavour that affects everyone, and something that everyone should have access to. Laura Strack

Hospitality is an experience of political indeterminacy and the infinite possibilities that can follow from it. If I am invited to dinner, it is not immediately clear how long I will stay, how much I will eat, or what I will bring as a gift. Genuine hospitality consists in the experience of precisely this indeterminacy. It thus contradicts the ideal of determinacy as demanded by contracts and property: is it yours or mine? Am I allowed to do this or that or not? Such questions are suspended in the context of genuine hospitality - they are flexibly shaped in the course of the hospitality situation, in a negotiation process that is in principle indefinitely progressive.

Does hospitality consist of questioning the newcomer?

It begins with the question that is addressed to the person coming [...]: What is your name? Tell me your name, what shall I call you? I, who call you, who want to call you by your name? What will I call you? This is the same question that is

WIE

occasionally asked, very tenderly, of children or lovers. Or does hospitality begin by receiving without asking, in a double cancellation, the cancellation of the question and the name? Is it fairer and more loving to ask or not to ask? To call by name or to call without a name? To give or to learn a name that has already been given? Is hospitality granted to a subject? Or is hospitality granted to the other, given to him before he identifies himself, indeed even before he is a subject, a legal subject and a subject to be called by his surname etc. (is set or presupposed as such)? ,

This reveals an antinomy, a clash of two laws at the boundary between two equally non-empirical legal systems. The antinomy of hospitality expresses an irreconcilable opposition between the law in its universal singularity and a plurality that is not only dispersion (the laws) but also a structured diversity that is de-terminated by a process of

division and differentiation by laws that distribute their history and their anthropological geography differently. ‘

NIE WIEDER EIGENTUM literally gives space to this description: the spectators are received as guests and then become hosts. The place where this invitation is extended, like the guests themselves, becomes a central actor. The place is the condition and the opportunity for something to take place. The space itself gives and creates space for the experience of a different order. And we are all involved in this. As spectators, as guests, we will experience that we can create a different order from that of contracts.

Following the breaks and folds, entering the niche and thus revealing it. Insist on the break, the threshold is a transition.

Places of aesthetic resistance // indeterminate aesthetic experience //

distinguish between fun and pleasure //

Oppression can also be fun, // Joy arises when you do something in a self-determined way.

As operators of Vierte Welt, we have been keeping a place **literally** and **metaphorically** open for almost 15 years. Like everything else, Vierte Welt is entangled in neoliberal logics, but due to its location (in the New Centre Kreuzberg, in the middle of a block of flats) and nature (e.g. ceiling height: 2.30 m / **four massive rectangular columns in the middle of the room**), it functions more like a

rupture, which virtually withdraws from itself, its classification and transverse position in Berlin's cultural life, from any kind of profit intention. As a space, Vierte Welt is perhaps something like an inter-zone. A remnant of what is long gone and is not yet. **A place that cannot realise itself.** Always on the edge.

Aesthetics of weakness // Representation without object // Archive of ghosts // Home //

Space gives space. Space gives place. Space makes it possible to actualise the potential. One of the essential tasks of art is to create imaginary spaces that allow experiences of what is not, what



does not take place, to nevertheless appear conceivable, tangible and potentially possible (Isaac Julien). An event is inconceivable without a place, the place precedes it. The question of whether we need new aesthetics or new institutions has been constantly posed in the contemporary art context for some time. homelessness is one perspective, undercommons another. With the first part of NIE WIEDER EIGENTUM—queerokratia, we worked on, among other things, creating a place that is not defined by who owns it. If we enter into a situation of negotiation that can only be conceived performatively, and can be produced as a performative act, because the space and the interventions that take place in it are aimed at the fact that we as guests (formerly spectators) have to negotiate how we want to be together, then

the place does not represent the owner (host/performer), but becomes a fluid context that escapes a fixed definition (law). NIE WIEDER EIGENTUM searches for such an eventful interruption of power relations. It is also about a very concrete reference: the space in which something takes place does not configure a homogeneous space-time, but something that takes place. There is nothing universal, but only singular, conditional, environmental, also in the sense of a neighbourhood, but not in the sense of a community. Something that relates to other singularities. Here, precariousness becomes the basis of the social and political.

"what is in the world is essentially precarious because it is not free, but in relation to and dependent on, not untouched, but

neighboring, not pure, but affected, moved, irritated." Laura Strack

In Vierte Welt, we have packaged our reference, our desire for connectivity and dependency in the word **WITH**.

Together **WITH** the philosopher Luce deLire, we have invited each other to make **NIE WIEDER EIGENTUM** with each other. In the edition of *Texte zur Kunst* by deLire that she edited and published, perspectives are presented that lie beyond representational justice (for marginalised groups). Luce deLire proposes hospitality as a starting point for working on the possibility of a different world. An invitation to indeterminacy that does not act in a standardising way. Art is the space in which such solutions can be tested. In the best sense, we experiment with

reality in the field of aesthetics. We are looking for an aesthetic judgment that makes us capable of acting without retreating into a relationship of dominance. In this sense, we want to design spaces that understand themselves as vessels of a BECOMING and thus point to a limited temporality. They mark a constitutive boundary between place and the becoming that takes place. The "we" that receives here (in the sense of a hostess) is receptive, porous and likes to be penetrated. Because it is also not a uniform, homogeneous body that presents and exalts itself.

We are looking for formats that understand the space performatively; the space becomes the protagonist, because it enables

us
to "see the
world with new
eyes" as a communal,
affective experience. NIE

WIEDER EIGENTUM

aries that does not arise from intoxicating devotion. This corresponds to our idea of an experience of the sublime, something that eludes any form. That which cannot be fixed, that which cannot be inscribed, that which cannot be represented per se. In this sense, they are also ghostly spaces enriched with a queer desire; the principle of an indeterminate + 1. They are located on the edge of the border; or as Donna Haraway puts it: in the mode of to stay with, and we, the guests, experience this becoming by witnessing the event within it. Objective access is ...

The edge is no longer an outer edge but the centre, a space in between. A mirrored

VIERTEWELT | Radikale Intimität | VIERTEWELT | Radikale Intimität

The spaces initiate the experience of a community/society to be invented in the performance. We meet as guests, at our own limits and limitations. This is meant quite symbolically: where I end, you begin. We can meet and touch each other there. But that only applies if it's not about an offer, not an exchange (trade). It is NOT a come touch my wound if you cannot believe (that I am Jesus), but it is precisely that indeterminacy/openness in which and where it is not clear what we could offer each other, and it is precisely this experience that allows us to touch and be touched. So we work along the maximum boundary, on and in a concrete space that has walls, an entrance and an exit, and it is precisely here that we work on the experience of dissolution of bound-

space, perhaps with performed music, this inner edge forms the framing for a time-out: in this space, which leaves the world outside by including it, we can encounter each other beyond economy and efficiency. We don't have to be anything (anymore). No more performance. And this space is only possible as a staged gap, a niche, as an aesthetic experience. We need staged spaces, art spaces, that are at the same time its own edge, because only in such a construction is a person a person and nothing else. Our artistic desire is aimed at a space beyond hierarchy and appropriation. A space free of domination and beyond a discourse of equality.



Fran de Pian and E.T., Tårnby Park Performance Festival, © Max Morris Doherty

Haunted institutions and struggles for hope

Marijana Cvetković

This is the voice of the place that lives in a permanent crisis, in a social, political, and economic crisis which is the result of a transformation from socialist to capitalist society. This brutal transformation (euphemistically called transition) has many cruel aspects that destroyed social relations in a very short time. The speed and the size of destruction with the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s were blinding and resulted in many lost lives, and families, collective traumas, the destruction of one country, and the creation of seven dwarf-countries with a fast and ruthless internal robbery of public goods (called privatisation that led to the general pauperisation) which was the way to create new classes of super rich and super poor. The eastern part of this larger conglomerate, called the Western Balkans, got stuck in this process with never resolved problems of historic heritage, mutual relations, a new identity, and the desired future. Such a situation in between the worlds has allowed the local economic and political oligarchies to get richer and better situated, profiting from the collective traumas, struggles for the survival of the majority,

and unclear near future. The political turmoil spurred by the controlled media is the perfect habitus for the Balkan oligarchs to survive and adapt to the political conditions according to their needs.

Resisting such processes is a mission. It can be done only collectively, together, while understanding how these processes started, what their roots are, the complexities of history and its multiple manifestations.

Working in the field of arts and culture allowed me to recognise their strength to create stages for different scenarios for different futures. I had professional experiences in all kinds of institutions – public, private, educational, cultural, political, local, and national, in the last 25 years, the years after the fall of Yugoslavia and the end of the Balkan wars. On this path I have witnessed the society and its institutions that are haunted by the remnants of the lost futures, very similar to what Mark Fisher mapped and discussed in his book “Ghosts of My Life. Depression, hauntology and lost futures” (2014). Haunted by the ghosts of nationalistic imaginary and the lost futures (of a capitalist state and free



"I am not of public interest"

market that “balances all”), these institutions are incapable of producing any relevant ideas and culture that may contribute to the society’s stability and improvements of people’s lives. Although these processes are not recognised only in Serbia and other post-Yugoslav societies, still they make a dramatic impact in these places because of the collective trauma of losing one identity and building another one most brutally, through the civil war. Double trouble.

The complex social, political, and economic crisis that has lasted too long in Serbia necessarily embodies the crisis of social imaginary. After the great collective dream of Yugoslav citizens about the bright future of a prosperous, independent,

solidary, and educated society based on high standards in education, a self-management system of social organisation, values of solidarity, equality, and brotherhood, the Serbian citizens found themselves without any dream about the future. The mere concern was to survive the next day (literally and symbolically). The new dominant discourse was based on the romantic past only, which can bring us nothing but new internal and external conflicts. In such processes, we can identify the consequences of the loss of the *transindividual horizon*, explained by Bojana Cvejić and Ana Vujanović as a capacity to produce together. The social conditions have deteriorated to such an extent that all social institutions have become empty shells, weak and incapable of fulfilling their social roles which is progressive and beneficial; there are the institutions of arts and culture too. Speaking about the dominance of individualism versus *communitas*, Cvejić and Vujanović compare the two modes of being in the society: “Social consciousness of the pre-individual and transindividual enriches the generic base, in which there is more abundance and multiplicity than the image of scarcity and austerity might suggest to an individual who must struggle to obtain his or her share.” (2016). The capacity to produce together,

to be together is being taken away from us as citizens every day by constant derogation of the meaning and function of justice and by introduction of fear. Here people suffer from injustice, oppression, and media-processed tyranny of the ruling oligarchy in everyday life: the criminals are honorable and distinguished citizens, while ordinary people are prosecuted, deprived, and humiliated. The level of internalised violence that occasionally finds its way towards the outside (such as the mass shooting at an elementary school in Belgrade in 2023 when a 13-year-old student killed 9 school friends and the school guard and severely wounded several people) is frightening and directly connected with the level of corruption and bribery.

This is the context in which the arts and culture must operate here. This is the context in which the independent culture scene must be strong, loud, and resistant. I choose to be there, to do my part in caring and sharing with the small circles of like-minded people. As a cultural worker, producer, curator, collaborator, and contexter, I choose to contribute to the restoration of the transindividual horizon which will enable the resistance to the humiliating and anti-intellectual public policies aimed at culture, education, science, and research,

as well as to the destruction of the common good that includes urban public space, schools, cultural institutions, water, agricultural land, unpolluted air and all other natural resources. The independent scene serves as a platform for various non-for-profit organisations that operate in the field of contemporary arts and culture in Serbia and that gathered to be a counterbalance to the state-controlled public institutions and profit-driven private cultural enterprises. It all started because of the neo-liberalisation of the public cultural policies that have undergone a drastic transformation from the beginning of the 1990s.

Due to the general political shift of the public policies, the cultural field significantly lost its role that it used to have in Yugoslavia. In those times, culture, together with education, was seen as a pillar of the new socialist society and was carefully taken care of. The size and complexity of the cultural system, with the variety of institutions, in a decentralised structure (for example, until 1960 only in rural Serbia, 2000 houses of culture and education were founded; the plan was to have 1 house of culture for every 3 settlements/villages), grounded in research and education, cross-pollinated with the education system and the media, made the

Yugoslav cultural production globally recognisable and connected. It is especially important to mention critical arts and culture production that was created in spaces dedicated to culture for youth (students' cultural centers, youth clubs, amateurs' arts clubs...); they allowed young people to experiment in arts, self-organise, relate to their social surrounding and shape and practice their critical minds. The results are Yugoslav conceptual art scenes (in Belgrade, Zagreb, Novi Sad, Ljubljana, and other cities), famous Yugoslav films and filmmakers, music production, arts festivals, students' cultural magazines, and so on).

From today's perspective, this previous system looks like a dream because the current cultural policies reduced the public culture to the reproduction of nationalistic, conservative or so-called neutral narratives that must take a spectacular form to be media attractive and avoid any critical attitude towards social reality. Step by step, all public institutions, strictly controlled by the government (or local governments), have adapted to this minor role: they are governed by politically correct directors who are instructed by the cultural authorities what to do and are fully dependent on their will. The fact that the cultural institutions of the

highest importance don't get professionals with knowledge in the field and previous professional experiences and merits, influences the programming, professional profile, institutional cooperation projects, list of local collaborators, and finally the effects on the local communities and the society in general. There is no accountability, no transparency, no dialogue. Such institutions are rooted in patriarchy, with male dominance, male identification, male-centeredness, and obsession with control, which is the same model of the political mainstream organisations, political parties, and the governmental structures they make. This creates a very difficult environment for the artists and cultural workers because critical and experimental artistic and cultural practices are not allowed. Artists, curators, theoreticians, producers, and thinkers are forced to look for other spaces and means to continue working. They are obliged to create their own spaces, organisations, platforms, festivals, and projects to provide for themselves basic conditions for cultural production that go beyond the official norms. Of course, many have tried to build bridges, including me, to not give up our public institutions and claim the right to work in them and with them. Most of the time, it was a disappointment by their

conservatism, a venom it injects into the social body.

This kind of socially and politically aware cultural work that in post-Yugoslav spaces started with the wars in the early 1990s as a part of the anti-war movement, continued to exist till today and constitutes the core of the independent culture. It is often criticised for being the facilitator of the neoliberal transformation of the cultural production field because it introduced the project-based operational mode to culture (together with flexibilisation of work in arts and culture, free-lance status, the concept of projectariat). But, at the same time, it was that cultural agent that wanted to preserve the Yugoslav heritage and keep this heritage live and present in the models of work: self-organisation, horizontal structures, solidarity as a basic principle of being together, regional collaboration (versus hostility of the mainstream politics and their official cultural policies), cultural and body diversity, feminist principles of equity and care, and critical thinking not only about the world but also about how they participate in this world.

Working in arts at such a place and under such conditions is a challenge and a madness. Belgrade is a beautiful place, but with many ghosts that haunt its streets and houses. All the layers of its tumultuous history are visible but hardly readable. Its cultural dynamics are powerful, inspiring, resisting, and wild. This is why it is so irresistible. Its main feature is people who don't lose hope. And this is why I fight for it. "Hope is a discipline... we have to practice it every day" (Mariame Kaba)

The previous year has been very hard in Belgrade and Serbia. The first-ever mass shooting in a school in May 2023 was experienced as the boiling point of all our collective delusions: it was a sign that society should be recalibrated urgently. It was like knocking the air out of the lungs, sudden and painful. Many citizens understood this ultimate act of violence as a pinnacle of capitalist cruelty where the collective trauma of social splitting is transferred and transformed into an individual sociopath.

This event initiated a series of political protests around the country against the political coalition holding the government for 12 years. The protests demanded crucial transformation of ways the society functions, and above all the transformation of education

policies, juridical system, media policies, and zero tolerance for corruption. The perverted inequalities that have been installed in Serbian society were threatening every citizen in every aspect of their life. The protests brought back a wave of hope among protesters and those who supported the protest. Previously weakened opposition parties got together in a united block and took over the protests, asking for new elections. With many manipulations and resistance to change, especially in the sphere of media and judiciary system, the parliament called out for elections that took place in December. And the perversion of the democratic procedures became crystal clear: the elections were stolen, citizens' votes distorted, and the will for change suppressed. The echo and consequences of that event are still ringing out.

It was clear that the regime in Serbia openly demonstrated that it was moving towards a dictatorship with no mercy. Targeting people who have opposition views, manipulations in the controlled media, strict control over all public institutions and systems, banning of several festivals ("because they are anti-Serbian"), the ban on artists and activists from the neighbouring countries entering Serbia are just a few manifestations

of the new turn to the right. While most of the Western liberal democracies threatened their citizens with accusations of antisemitism if they raised their voices against the Gaza genocide, the Serbian president incited fear in his co-citizens with "the neighbours' plan to destroy Serbia in 5 points".

Fear and hopelessness are the dominant feelings in the public spaces. This is why I want to write down this roller-coaster of emotions, ideas, rage, excitement, hope... especially hope that I need to practice daily. *I want to put a vector of force into my world.*

Building the independent scene for many years, in different constellations and with various focuses, allowed me and my colleagues to practice change, resilience, and critical work in arts and culture. These flexible, liquid structures that needed to change and adapt to unsecured and unstable conditions made us learn how to combine our skills, knowledge, and values: curatorial approaches, production skills, theoretical research, political and activist strategies, managerial tactics, cultural policy insights, advocacy techniques, public speaking skills, feminist care and determination, Yugoslav anti-fascism and international solidarity.

The structures that were created from these processes have been the products of hope

that it is possible to resist and produce knowledge that is traceable and transferable to different contexts and conditions. The practices of sharing, co-thinking, co-writing, being together had many challenges and failures. But, the experience of collective struggles, resistance, experimenting with modes of production in arts and culture, as well as the political solidarity (Sally Scholtz) in opposition to competing for individual achievements, are the most valuable experiences of self-emancipation and of collective emancipation. It is a genuine learning experience and political profiling.

The platform of independent culture in Serbia is the only place of resistance in culture that uses the multiple voices of its members across the country to articulate the problems in culture and to propose solutions and interventions into the system. Member organisations who work in smaller towns or villages are very often the only creators of contemporary art programs in those places, which is why their significance is great. They are those local actors who give the possibility to the local population, especially young people, to have direct contact with contemporary arts and to experience contemporary culture. This should be the value that is cherished and encouraged by both local

and national cultural authorities. Independent organisations struggle to survive and keep up with program-making because they are usually not supported at all by any public cultural fund. In such a position, their presence in the independent culture network opens for them more possibilities through sharing of common resources, and exchange of skills and knowledge. So, we support each other and learn from each other.

We have learned together how to deal with cultural policies that ignore us. In the documents of the Ministry of Culture, there is no such thing as “independent culture”. As individual organisations, we apply for funding for our projects every year. Very few get some minimal support and never enough for even one single activity. This is the money we don’t want to give up although in many cases it does not make any difference in the total budget of a project or program. We believe that this public budget is ours too. When the Ministry announces the results of the calls for projects, our projects are usually not on this list. We receive the evaluation from the jury: THIS PROJECT IS NOT IN PUBLIC INTEREST. It would be acceptable if we didn’t know that many other projects proposed by several, well-known GONGOs (*government-organised non-governmental organisations*)

that even don’t operate in arts and culture, received millions for phantom projects that will never be implemented. This is one more fake procedure and a corruption instrument that we have to deal with: to fight against it and fight for it, seduced by the need to share the common good and to work in the public interest. During years of such manipulation and abuse of cultural funding by the government, the independent scene started doing regular analysis of all results of the public calls for projects in the field of culture, on all levels – from the Ministry of Culture to local municipalities, cities, and regions. We do it together, guided by the researchers and media experts because these reports are presented to the public through all the independent media. The reports that confirm the abuse of public funding and the public debates that follow them, contribute to the political struggle and expose manipulations of the oligarchy. This is one of the ways the independent cultural scene contributes to public awareness and political gathering against the regime.

What I learned from all these years is that such a work in such a context makes sense more than anything else. I also learned that speaking with these politicians is impossible: they are not interested in culture in any other way than “to keep the status quo, avoid

problems and eventually use it to improve the public image”. Which is great because I never wanted our meetings to become tools for them to learn how to manipulate more.

I understand that it is impossible to imagine better working conditions for artists, progressive cultural policies, more space for arts and culture, and a better position for the cultural sector in this same political system. Fighting for a political change is the only precondition for a change of cultural institutions and policies. I truly hope this is possible through getting together, speaking, thinking, and sharing, just as we did in the Phantoms of Stability project: sketching a horizon of hope. All my community-making engagements and projects are meaningful to me because these long-lasting, time-consuming, failures-based learning processes have had capacities to emancipate myself and my comrades and colleagues.

“Hope is an axe you break down doors with in an emergency”, Rebecca Solnit (2016).



Silence is its own kind of symphony

Storm Møller Madsen

This text is both a reflection and an effort to open a discussion to ask critical questions about the role and authority of the performing arts industry in a time of multiple world crises. What are the conditions of the contemporary Danish performing arts scene and its ability to engage in urgent political topics?

It is simultaneously an effort to document and archive the work, done primarily under the name Performing Arts for Ceasefire, to break the performing arts industry's silence in relation to the atrocious events we have witnessed in Gaza since October 2023, and which are still ongoing as I write this at the end of May 2024. Trying to make sense of it. To make the work available for others. To document it.

The following pages poses more questions than it answers – I hope it can be a starting point for a further conversation. These issues are not meant to be solved alone, but in community.

Through this text I hope to ask not so much what we *should* say, but *what we are able* to say, and *how we can say it*. Are the Danish performing arts institutions, organisations and groups able to speak out on

contemporary topics of political nature – and under what conditions? What happens when they don't – what is the reason and consequences of their silence? Some say that the silence is due to tradition, others say that it is because the institutions are not political. But their silence is just as political, if not more so.

Taking the events in Gaza as an urgent starting point: if we wanted to speak out on issues of contemporary war crimes in Gaza, could we use the theatre as a place to do so? What “tools” do we have for speaking out?

And what are the conditions of our artistic freedom when it comes to contemporary political issues? How precarious are our institutions if they choose to speak up?

The following pages are a way of making transparent the thoughts, processes and discussions around the question of the role of the performing arts and its ability to react when it comes to urgent political events and topics. As a writer and initiator of many of these initiatives seeking to break the silences, I am not neutral – no one is. I have my own stance on the events in Gaza and though they are present as a part of this text, in the language

and as a part of the narrative of the solidarity work, the text is not about arguing for mine or others' opinions on the years' long Israel-Gaza conflict. The purpose of this text is, through different examples and discussions, to make apparent issues surrounding the role of the contemporary Danish performing arts scene, its complicit role within a contemporary political world and how, if at all, we can meet around pressing topics within the theatre as a place fundamentally defined by a time and space where we gather.

Many conversations have inspired and lifted this work and continue to do so. None of this is done alone but always in community. Despite me being the one pressing send on emails, making statements or managing social media accounts, there is always more than one set of hands involved. Throughout the text I will therefore use “we” when referring to the ones doing the work. Sometimes there are many, sometimes there are few. But I don't believe solidarity work is ever done alone.

Phantom of Stability, the project in relation to which this text is published, has played a significant role as a space for reflection, transcultural exchange and in-depth discussions about the precarity of the performing arts field and the possibilities for participating in the public debate or activating the performing arts and theatre

as a space of gathering in a time of crisis.

The way our conversation on the precarity of the arts institution over the past year, has been able to hold the complexity and continuously changing cultural and political climate has been an inspiration; and, in its own right, it has been an example of how spaces of art can adapt, make space for and claim the relevance of burning political issues for the performing arts.

The starting point for the text is the events in Gaza and the efforts to form and show solidarity with the Palestinian people and to call for a ceasefire and protection of civilian lives on both sides of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

For the past seven months, the world has witnessed the killing of thousands of civilians while the Israeli army has carried out what human rights organisations deem a genocide in Gaza. The war crimes in Gaza have resulted in a total breakdown of any infrastructure and health care system. More than 36,000 people have been killed, including more than 14,000 children (OCHA, 2024). Gaza's universities have been turned into ruins and many teachers, staff and students have lost their lives. The UN describes the situation in Gaza as a “scholasticide” and a deliberate destruction of Gaza's education system (OHCHR, 2024).

As protests against the Israeli attacks on Gaza have risen – in the streets, at universities, in art institutions – and solidarity with the Palestinian people from scholars, artists and students has led to terminations, censorship and expulsion, Gaza has also become an issue of freedom of speech – of scholarly and artistic freedom. Pressure from artists and students on their institutions to take responsibility and divest as well as stand up for the protection of Palestinian people is increasing every day.

In October and November of 2023, the hallways of the university where I work feel uncomfortably quiet and almost ghostly. I walk among co-workers, share talks over coffee in the kitchen, chats in the office – but none of us mention what is happening in Gaza. I am nervous to mention anything. In my office of three PhD students someone finally breaks the silence and we each share our concerns about addressing the violence happening in Gaza and how it is not addressed within the university or the art institutions which all remain silent.

I put up posters in the hallways of the building where my office is. I guess it's my way of bringing the Palestinian reality in relation to our everyday life and the institution we work in. A way of breaking a silence.



In early January 2024, after contemplating it for weeks, I post on my personal Instagram in response to the silence on the events in Gaza from the Danish Performing Arts industry.

My text reads: “I think a lot about the silence around the genocide in Palestine from the Danish theatres and members of the performing arts scene. It makes me angry and sad that no Danish theatres are stepping forward in solidarity with the Palestinian people”.

Underneath my own text a longer bit of text from an unknown author. The final paragraph reads: “So, art and artists that seemingly have nothing to say about this ongoing genocide are in fact *saying something about this ongoing genocide*. Silence is its own kind of symphony”. (Unknown)

Underneath the posted images I write: “I think a lot about the silence surrounding



the genocide in Palestine from Danish theatres and performing artists with strong public voices. It makes me both angry, sad and disappointed about the position many evidently believe theatre holds in society. Apparently, it does not oblige them to come forward and show solidarity when we witness a genocide. It worries me that Danish theatre apparently sees itself as separate from the current events in Palestine. In other countries, we see a wide range of theatre institutions coming forward with statements. But in Denmark, it's generally quiet. Way too quiet in my opinion. Let's remember that silence often implies tacit acceptance of events – not saying anything IS saying something. It is complicity in events that are of the utmost relevance to our world and thus our art form, field and professionalism. Theatre is and should be a part of society – theatre is a political space simply because it's where we gather – and therefore

we should have a voice when our society is turned upside down as it is now” (My own translations of the text).

Several colleagues and professionals from the industry respond. Some echo my frustration with the silence from the Danish performing art scene. An old colleague of mine, who is now the artistic director of a theatre in Copenhagen, expresses similar thoughts and critique and notes that we, in Denmark, unfortunately do not have a tradition of using the theatre to respond to political subjects like they do in Germany, for example.

I wonder under which conditions such a tradition can or should be broken. If and when the theatre is and is not a place for political “responding”.

Is it this tradition of the performance arts role in Danish society that results in the silence on Gaza in the performing arts industry? Under which conditions do we decide to break it?

On January 11th we air the platform “Scenekunstbranchen for våbenhvile” (Performing Arts for Ceasefire). We write a statement which is posted on social media platforms and our website.

And we create an online form where members of the performing arts industry can sign the solidarity declaration. The statement reads as follows:

The Performing Arts Industry in Solidarity with Palestine

In the Danish performing arts industry, we stand together to demand an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and protection for the Palestinian people!

We, members of the Danish performing arts industry – on, behind and around the stage – declare our deepest support for the Palestinian people and condemn Israel’s attacks on Palestine, including all aggression in Gaza and the West Bank.

We demand that the Danish government cease its economic, moral and military support for the Israeli occupation’s attacks on the Palestinian people. An attack described by humanitarian organisations and international experts as genocide involving war crimes. It is an occupation of Palestine that began 75 years ago and, in its intense escalation over the past three months, has displaced more than 1.9 million and killed over 27,000 Palestinians in Gaza, almost half of whom are children.

These enormous civilian losses are not just numbers; they represent a culture of living people with dreams and hopes. They are our colleagues, someone’s friends, families and children. All individuals who have been deprived of the right to live.

We stand in solidarity with our colleagues in Palestine, including The Freedom Theatre, which has experienced repeated targeted attacks by the Israeli military, and we mourn the Palestinian artists whose lives and voices have tragically been lost to the world forever.

As performing artists and individuals connected to the performing arts industry, we work in and with an art form where we come together.

Theatre is and has always been a space where we can meet in diversity and exchange, where we collectively create and connect with each other as humans. The theatre space is also a space that historically has provided a foundation for criticism and political solidarity, both in Denmark and abroad. The performing arts should not remain neutral towards its contemporary world. Therefore, we see it as our duty to step forward and use our voices at a time when the world and our Danish society are turned upside down, and we witness catastrophic events in Palestine that cost civilian lives every hour.

The attacks on Palestine are supported by our government, with us as involuntary contributors. We cannot stand by without using our voices!

We demand that the Danish government does everything in its power to:

- Demand an immediate and lasting ceasefire
- Stop the humanitarian catastrophe and ensure that all aid reaches civilians in Gaza unhindered
- Uphold UN resolutions and human rights
- Work towards lasting peace and freedom for all, regardless of ethnicity and religion
- Stop the illegal settlements by Israel

We distance ourselves from all forms of discrimination and the killing of civilians, both Palestinians and Israelis. Everyone has the right to a dignified life in peace and freedom.

We stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Signed by actors, performers, dancers, lighting and sound designers, producers, technicians, researchers, dramaturges, choreographers, directors, playwrights, set designers, production managers, tailors, prop masters, makeup artists, students, educators, volunteers and others affiliated with the Danish performing arts industry

(Scenekunstbranchen for Våbenhvile. 2024c)

Within 24 hours the solidarity declaration receives over 300 signatures. Within the next two months it receives over 600 signatures. It seems there is a relief that the silence from the industry is at least partly broken. A few institutions and organisations share the statement on their social media platforms, the larger institutions remain silent.

Calling in, calling out



Screenshot from @scenekunstmemes, Instagram. The image text reads: Top: Use your artistic freedom to fight for Palestinian freedom. Bottom: Use your artistic freedom to fight for artistic freedom.

A performance arts group on whose board I am on gets called out on social media. They are critiqued for standing up for artistic freedom through public happenings under the title “Defend Artistic Freedom” but now, during the attacks on Gaza, for not making any artistic interventions or statements in support of the Palestinian people.

I talk to one of the members of the group on the phone. We talk about the role and potential of the performing arts. How it can serve as a tool for political change. About the group’s will to use their art form as a medium for making interventions in the political landscape. We also talk about their precarity. About them as an all young, female collective, newly educated, trying to insist on collective forms of performance making and on a critical practice.

We discuss the relation between their private activism and them as a group and an entity within the Danish performing arts field. All members of the collective have been active in speaking up against the violence in Gaza on their personal social media accounts. They agree with the critique of their different ways of engaging with the two crises but also feel misrepresented by being framed as not caring about the ongoing violence in Gaza.

We talk about various strategies for speaking out. Happenings, collaborations, statements. The silence of the larger performance arts field on Gaza remains like a cloud over our brainstorm. What would it cost for them to speak out? Is publicly calling the group out an effort to call them in, to show them support if or when they decide to intervene?

Either way, I believe, it ignores or disregards some of the complexities of the issue.

As much as I, like the group themselves, agree with the critique, it lacks the nuances that I believe are needed. It does not account for the ways in which the group is participating and using their platforms, and in calling them out for not doing “anything”, the meme creates a norm for how this “doing” must look. It also does not account for the risk of speaking out on Gaza and assumes the ability to do so by framing the context around artistic freedom. The easy take is to call them out for not “following through” on their political performance practice and exposes their supposed hypocrisy. The harder take would be to ask what the conditions are for artistic freedom in the case of Gaza. Can artists speak freely? Under what conditions? With what risk?

After our talk I wonder about the relation between the people within a performance group or a theatre and the organisation as a whole. When do you speak out on behalf of “your” institution – like the artistic director of a theatre who comes to represent the theatre as a whole? And when does our more private “activism” not translate into representing the group or institution as a whole?

We must have a critical awareness about when a demand for a specific reaction from the arts to a political issue becomes suffocating and limits creative thinking about exactly what kinds of responses might be most effective and suitable for our field. Simultaneously we must be aware when the silence borders on censorship or self-censorship. A silence due to the fear of losing funding or getting on the wrong side of a board or politicians.

At the end of January 2024
Performing Arts for Ceasefire
send out the following call to

over 90 performing arts institu-
tions within Denmark:

DEAR DANISH PERFORMING ARTS INSTITUTION

Let us together break the silence from the Danish performing arts institutions and demand a ceasefire in Gaza!

We, Performing Arts for Ceasefire, are contacting you as an institution/organisation within the performing arts field. We would like to encourage you to read and sign our appeal for a ceasefire in Gaza and share the appeal within your organisation and through your networks and platforms.

The declaration of solidarity has so far been signed by over 560 members of the Danish performing arts sector. And this call has been sent to more than 90 Danish performing arts institutions, organisations and theaters.

As a voice in a diverse and democratic cultural context, we urge you, as a Danish performing arts institution, to publicly distance yourselves from Denmark's support of the crimes against humanity we have witnessed in Gaza over the past 100 days and more, which have cost the lives of more than 24,000 Palestinians, nearly half of whom are children.

We believe that together we should stand in solidarity with our colleagues in Palestine, including those at The Freedom Theatre, who have experienced repeated targeted attacks from the Israeli military.

The performing arts should not remain neutral in relation to its contemporary world. Therefore, we see it as our responsibility to step forward and use our voices at a time when the world and our Danish society are in turmoil, and we are witnessing an attack on Palestine that humanitarian organisations and international experts describe as genocide and that includes war crimes.

We urge you to:

- As an institution/organisation, sign the declaration demanding a ceasefire in Gaza.
- Publicly announce that your performing arts institution demands a ceasefire in Gaza.
- Share the declaration of solidarity with your network and followers.
- Encourage your members, employees, and partners to read, sign and share the declaration.
- Help break the silence from the performing arts sector about the events in Gaza.

Let us together break the silence from the Danish theatres and performing arts institutions.

Sincerely,

Performing Arts for Ceasefire

(Scenekunstbranchen for Våbenhvile. 2024a)

Responses

I receive multiple answers to the call. Some are critical, some are positive, some express a will to do something within an institutional framework but doubt whether they have the authority to do so. From the Danish Royal Theatre, I get an answer that they cannot speak out as The Royal Theatre as a state institution is not able to participate in political initiatives. This is due to the fact that they are under

the Danish Cultural Ministry and as such follow their guidelines on what they can say and how to speak out on political issues.

From an established theatre in Copenhagen, I get an email explaining how they had previously gotten into "trouble" with their board and their funding body, the municipality of Copenhagen, for speaking out on political art issues.

It happened when the artistic director of the theatre was interviewed and proposed a critical stance on a new law that could limit the artistic freedom of especially performance artists. This time they want to check with their board and their funders at the Copenhagen municipality before speaking out.

Both responses are disheartening in their own way. They pose the question of who decides what the theatres can engage in and under what conditions. And, on a larger scale, the role of the theatre (as a political and social institution) in society. What limitations arise for the theatre as a space for political and social engagement and solidarity due to its relation to a board and dependence on state, private or municipal financial support? Who makes the decisions about what and how the theatres can engage in a political conversation and under what conditions?

What seems to be under pressure is the arm's length principle. A tradition we so proudly align ourselves with in Denmark.

I call the Ministry of Cultural Affairs to get clarity on the status of the Royal Theatre and their ability to speak on political issues. On the phone, they tell me there is no clear guideline on how the state theatre should

handle or can act on a political matter. But when I ask how they know what their parameters are for speaking out, a secretary tells me that the government and the state theatre work a bit like a family: "Well, you know, it's like in a family where you stand up for each other and align your opinions and expressions"[my paraphrasing of the answer].

Seminar on political theater

In March 2024 there is a seminar on political theatre at a larger theatre in Copenhagen. The invite mentions nothing about Gaza or Palestine or the censorship many artists and academics are experiencing due to their support of Palestine and call for a ceasefire.

During the panel no one mentions Gaza until the very end when a co-worker of mine finally brings it into the space. I get asked to speak about my work with Performing Arts for Ceasefire.

I explain what we have done and why I have found it important to try to break the silence within the field and to argue that the atrocities in Gaza are of utmost relevance to our field. I also say that by not doing or saying anything, not using our platforms and places of gathering to speak or act, we become complicit in the violence.

Someone raises their hand and responds that art should always speak for itself, and I

should not be demanding all institutions to make a call or public statement in solidarity with Palestine.

This comment and critique is relevant and keeps coming up in the conversations about the art institutions' role in times of crises.

I answer that this is not what I am suggesting. There are many ways of showing solidarity. In curating, in financial compensation, in the form of discursive programmes, in interrupting our daily life and our everyday work in the theatre because our world is turned upside down.

In the letter to the Danish performing arts institutions and organisations we did encourage a public declaration and call for ceasefire. But I recognise more and more that solidarity can be shown in many ways and does not have to involve public written statements. But it does require action. It does require showing up.

What matters, as much or maybe more than showing, through an art form, that we stand with peace, is to show that a conflict that in this way has influenced and divided the world is of *relevance* to our field. That at least *breaking the silence* to show that we, as a performing arts industry, are of the same world as the one which is witnessing and living (and dying) through war crimes.

Maybe we then can stop debating what we should say, or if we should say it, and start talking about how we show that the heart-breaking events and humanitarian crisis in Gaza which has turned the world and our Danish society upside down, which has received numerous solidarity declarations from within our and related fields, and which continues after 8 months IS of relevance to our field. And that we need to affirm that.

Sadly, the panel and the seminar day ends then – and we never get to unpack it further. I guess the hesitation or fear of bringing it into the space – for myself included – gave us only time to briefly mention it.

After the seminar, when people gather in the foyer, many express gratitude for the solidarity work and the importance of raising this discussion and breaking the theatre's silence. Several people tell me that they have had many internal meetings and conversations about how to navigate their institution's complicit silence. That there is a will to "do something"; for the theatre and performing arts to be involved in the contemporary political conversation – the current cultural and political crisis. But also, that there are internal disagreements on what to do and how. And that there is a fear of speaking up or positioning oneself too politically. That many boards are against the-
atres speaking up.

In the spring and summer of 2024 we do a number of writings and happenings in collaboration with other solidarity initiatives. We publish a text in the online journal ISCENE:

Scenekunstbranchen vil have våbenhvile i Gaza: "Vi kan ikke se til uden at bruge vores stemmer!"



Image text reads: "The performing arts industry wants ceasefire in Gaza: We cannot witness these events without speaking up!" Screenshot from iscene.dk. See references at the end of this text.

We do both watermelon and kite happenings in collaboration with Art Workers for Palestine. Here pictured outside of the Danish Royal Theatre at Kgs. Nytorv, Denmark.



Photo: Jeanette Schou

We also do a solidarity declaration to Students Against Occupation and Genocide who had set up camp at the University of Copenhagen demanding the university to divest. This declaration was done in collaboration with Writers for Palestine, Music Industry for Ceasefire, Art Workers for Palestine and Film Industry for Ceasefire.



Photo: Omar Righi, graphic design: Michael Länger. Image text reads: Solidarity declaration for Students against Occupation and Genocide. See references at the end of this text.

In early June 2024 I am a part of hosting the panel *Matters of Crisis* at Tårnby Park Studio in collaboration with two colleagues.

We have invited three representatives from three theatre institutions in Denmark. And we have prepared the following questions.

1. In our historical present, political neutrality seems increasingly impossible. Where does that put the performing arts? And how do you navigate this "new" reality?
2. What do you think about the Danish "tradition" of considering the performing arts as a largely apolitical space? Unlike, for example, Germany. How does this affect the position of the performing arts in times of crisis, such as the attacks on Gaza?
3. What role do you think the performing arts can/should play in times of crisis? As a gathering place, as a voice, as a mirror for society?
4. What is your relationship with your board, supporters, etc.? Do they influence your artistic choices when it comes to specific topics? How/How not?
5. Is there an arm's length principle? Is it a problem that the arts are so heavily funded by the state?

6. What kind of self-censorship in relation to political topics do you think exists among theatre directors and artists?
7. How can we ensure the safety of employees and audiences in relation to political projects that border on activism?

8. What means do we have, as art institutions, to respond to contemporary conflicts and crisis?

Many themes come up during the panel:

- Self-censorship.
- Art speaking for itself.
- The artists' precarity when they become the voice of resistance.
- The repercussions of being political as a theatre. And the strategies of making it possible to have a political voice.
- Art – activism – activism.
- Traditions.
- Neutrality.
- The power of the boards.
- The fear of losing funding.

- Artists asking the institution to break the silence and show solidarity with Palestine.
- Institutional neutrality as a strategy – and its impossibility.
- The white canvas of the theatre director. And challenges to this.

We talk about a carefulness that seeps in through the cracks and affects the programming and artistic decisions. Carefulness as a way to protect the employees, the art institution, secure funding, stay on good terms with the board and local politicians. But also, what limits experimentation and artistic relevance.

How can the theatre have a voice, use its platform to speak out, be a part of a contemporary political climate if we are ruled by carefulness? This is a form of self-censorship.

We also talk about the responsibility of the institution and the director. Whether the director and the institution are white canvases, there to support and protect the art and artist, but not a voice in itself. Or whether the institution and director have the responsibility to take a stand, step up and be a voice. If they do not take a stand outwardly, we risk furthering the precarity of the artists when they become the

critical voice of solidarity or resistance.

I believe that those with resources, spaces, programming authority have a responsibility to find new formats. To adjust their institution to be able to hold and respond to our time. This time of crisis. We must remember that an institution is also action. Institution is something we do – instituting. And thus, it is what we make it. It is the choices we make. Continuously. A responsibility but also a possibility.

After the talk I think about how needed this space was and is. And how much we need moments of gathering around these hard topics. That we need each other; to hear how others are struggling with similar issues.

It became clear from the panel that we need solidarity and community in our struggles. We talked about collecting cases from theatres experiencing censorship and threats to their artistic freedom when it comes to political and more divisive topics. A form of solidarity through transparency.

Concluding reflections

In these months of organising within the context of Performing Arts for Ceasefire, during which the intensity of the situation in Gaza and subsequently around the world has only increased. Where death tolls have gone up, where university protests are

increasing, where artists and academics are getting silenced and fired, I still wonder under what conditions we decide to break the silence. When do we start to use the theatre to say that this burning world is relevant to us; that the theatre, as a place of gathering, is a think tank in which we can discuss and affect our current political world? For me, only then, does the theatre as an artform really show its potential. Fundamentally, it is about a faux impression that the theatre is not a political space. Or that some forms of theatre are political while others are not. All art is political, maybe especially when it's "not".

In their commentary "Hvid Støj" (White Noise) art historians Marie Fintsen Jensen and Anna Vestergaard Jørgensen critically examine and question the institutional responsibility of the Danish art institutions in relation to current and urgent political issues.

They write: "The reason for the art institutions' 'neutrality' and silence can only be guessed at: Perhaps it stems from a general fear of polarized political discourse, perhaps from a desire to maintain the status quo, perhaps from a fear of lower attendance figures, or perhaps the 'neutrality' and silence are expressions of the belief that the art space can be kept separate from the

real political sphere. As long as the reasons are not explicitly stated, they have the character of white noise, which is all the more deafening once noticed." (Jørgensen and Jensen 2024 - my translation).

And later: "We certainly do not believe that institutions should take a stance on all crises and wars, but if the fear of addressing political and humanitarian crises, which are less unequivocal for Christiansborg than, for example, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, becomes too great, the art institutions lose their relevance." (Jørgensen and Jensen 2024 - my translation).

Following Jørgensen and Jensen's comparison between the art institution's reactions to Ukraine and Palestine; several Danish theatres too had Ukrainian flags on display, hosted Ukrainian events, invited Ukrainian artists to collaborate etc. in the winter and spring of 2022. But are the theatres not able to participate when the issues are less unequivocal than Russia's invasion of Ukraine? The lack of initiatives from the performing arts industry tells me there is a lot at stake in participating in the conversations on Gaza. But I also believe it says something about a lack of willingness to rethink the role of the theatre and how we gather around it. Could we not imagine that the theatre could form a place of community, mourning,

conversation, doubts, frustration, actions and much more in exactly these times of crises?

I believe Jørgensen and Jensen ask some immensely important questions. And I think they are right that the silence, when it remains unexplained, becomes complicit in the violence. I also strongly believe that the art institutions risk losing their relevance when they cannot participate in the contemporary conversations on such critical issues as Gaza. In the contemporary Danish political reality, we need a place for dialogues on our historical presence and its burning issues. I believe the theatre is, can and should be that place. If the contemporary theatre organisations and institutions in Denmark do not or cannot participate in “complicated” or less definite contemporary political conversations, then they risk losing their importance and relevance. And miss the chance to engage the audience in matters that are important to their lives and times.

What I, from my work, have wondered, and tried to start a conversation about through this text, is: what is the performing arts institutions authority to do and say something? Can they speak out? How? Under what premises? How do the boards, traditions, unspoken expectations, carefulness, political climate, funding bodies play a role in determining how the

theatre can act and speak out on the larger societal and political scene.

And importantly; when do we talk about these relations and how they affect the art we truly care about and believe in? Have the promise of the arm’s length principle and the Danish “traditions” of the theatre as an apolitical sphere pushed us into a corner where the theatre is losing its relevance and potential as a critical mirror to society? How do we create a solidaristic practice that can break or make transparent some of these ties?

Through my conversations with members of the Danish performing arts industry I understand that many feel unsure, worried, trapped, careful. And that they both agree and disagree on the role of the theatre. I see many institutions and organisations trying to navigate opposing opinions of the staff, the relation between the individual voices and the voice of the institution, relations with boards, funding bodies, artists and audience. Navigating the precariousness of their institution.

The organisation or institution is never more than the people inhabiting it – than its relations. The discussions within an organisation about how to navigate the surrounding political climate rarely becomes visible to others. The silence from an institution externally does

not always represent a silence internally. But we need to make these discussions more public and more importantly more collective.

We need places for qualified dialogue about the role of the performing arts within our historical present. And embracing complexity is key. Institutions and individuals within the performing arts field

need to be able to enter into the dialogue on complex issues without having the answers, but be able to participate in a space of institutional and professional vulnerability and ambiguity that will allow for an actual development of our field.

I guess that’s what this text is trying to do.

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Walking the institutional tightrope

Andreas Liebmann

Quality control

Recently, Tårnby Park Studio once again received one of many rejections for funding. The kind jury even took the trouble to justify the rejection: “We don't see how your methods can lead to success.” “We don't see how the population will be involved.” “We don't see how the work will be implemented later.” After seven years of artistic development and a constantly surprisingly lively network in the local neighbourhood and the theatre scene, this justification was equivalent to a vote of no confidence. Or a lack of understanding. Perhaps also a lack of fundamental interest. Maybe we didn't present our plans clearly enough? Possibly we took it too much for granted that our concerns and our work would be easy to understand, even for those not previously involved. Where is our blind spot? Although I always like to mobilise self-doubt, the rejection in this case was not due to a lack of substance in our work. In an email response to this adverse decision, I tried to describe better what we do and invited the jury members to our next festival. But the train has left the station, and the jury is turning its attention to new applications. How do you learn to speak the language of those from whom you hope to receive support for your artistic work? As a rule, juries do not perceive blurs in concepts as an opportunity but as a weakness. There is no way around finding a language for the blurs that the people who distribute (or withhold) funds understand. It is unlikely that the decision makers will fill in missing information themselves or research it with interest. But the uncertainties we work with at Tårnby Park Studio are obviously difficult for us to communicate - and that is precisely the task. Otherwise nothing will ever change. Working with uncertainties is the principle. There are philosophical, artistic, political and practical reasons for this. We seek out uncertainty. We see opportunities for life in dealing with uncertainty. We must seek out uncertainty because the parameters generally regarded as “certain” do not offer this certainty either or are at least only deceptive. What is success, what is a career, what is “good art”, what are good production conditions and what is the role of art in a community? New answers to these questions need to be found again and again. Many freelance artists

are also structurally uncertain simply because there is no institution that could offer them a permanent employment contract for their work. They do not have the privilege of sitting in an armchair judging quality. They have to produce the quality themselves in small-scale work. Working with uncertainty is partly voluntary, partly born of necessity. And at Tårnby Park Studio, we try to make something of it.

All institutions have their time and times of their *raison d'être*. Tårnby Park Studio sees itself in resonance with new institutions and attempts at institutionalisation that have emerged from artistic formations. People who together try to think in a new way about art production, production relationships, aesthetics and local relatedness. This sometimes clashes with institutional reality, local cultural policy, funding habits and different ideas of art or social life. Creating an institution between fear and ideas of happiness puts you out of balance. Well, we have gone there, we want to endure it.

Four possible mantras for now:

- We cannot face crises only with the production of security.
- We cannot face art only by producing results.
- Overcoming a crisis cannot succeed if the process is constantly monitored.
- The word quality assurance is a contradiction in terms.

I recently met the curator and “Metropolis” festival director, Trevor Davis, at a workshop I organised at the Danish National School for Performing Arts. He was talking about the performance of a tightrope walker. She said to him in the preparation that it was more dangerous to secure yourself than to dance across the line without a safety rope. There would be many more accidents with a safety rope. Davis' conclusion: improvising in public requires more knowledge and skill than securing yourself beforehand and doing everything right. I listened to this with some satisfaction because our “improvising around” is often perceived by representatives of “established institutions” as lacking a concept, groundless, and amateurish. And that's what it can become if you lose your footing. To a certain extent, however, public tightrope walking when building institutional relationships is only possible without a safety rope. That is the danger and the quality of our work, and I am still trying to find a language that makes the quality of it more tangible because what is certain is that we need partners. We need friends. Those who have so much stability that they can distribute money must be convinced that the money in our hands is well invested. But what

do we have to offer? Perhaps this: we have good reasons for the way we work. These reasons need to be explained.

Being a foreigner

Shimmying forward, walking over a precipice and holding on to each other, seeking help, getting help, not getting help, going it alone. Luckily, sitting on a road, you can't fall into a ravine.

When I sat on the streets of Tårnby for the first time in 2017, in a square in front of the local Netto supermarket, to start up conversations with passers-by, I of course knew nothing about Tårnby Park Studio (TPS) and its sort-of-institutional future. I was interested in the question of “public space” in Tårnby. Where do people in Tårnby experience a public space? Where do they see themselves reflected in a public discourse? Does “public space” play a role for them at all, and what role? The answers I received were all very individual. All of the interviewees had different ideas about their relationship to the public sphere. Some wanted nothing to do with the public sphere. Others described their experience of the public sphere when playing sport or getting involved in clubs.

I had only been living in Denmark for a year at the time. I had no idea how Tårnby functioned institutionally, and I only had a rudimentary understanding of Danish. Nevertheless, my first thoughts developed there, in the square in front of the local supermarket, which still move me and which have produced something that has something institutional about it through the continuity of starting again and again, inviting again and again, writing applications again and again and receiving money from time to time. The “Tårnby Park Studio” that has emerged from this has to be set up again and again, it has to be produced performatively again and again. Tårnby Park Studio has no stone foundations. It is only made by the people who carry it. Its stability depends on relationships that keep saying “yes” to it. Over the years, we have always managed to involve and somehow interest artists, neighbours, politicians, administrators and families. Public space cannot be done alone, that was the first lesson I learned sitting on the street.

I only dared to develop an institution without a mandate and without a superior, and initially even without a collective, because I didn't even know that I was developing an institution at the time.

Initially, Tårnby Park Studio did not arise from a collective impulse, but from a foreigner moving into Danish society, with some support from a small grant from the Danish National School for Performing Arts. It is important to say that I did not sit in front of the

Netto supermarket as a homeless person but as a funded artist. With the TPS, my professional-artistic vehicle developed in Denmark, in the local public space. It is closely linked to my personal and professional history. This very personal connection to Tårnby Park Studio, the institutional performance that I have been doing with Tårnby Park Studio for seven years, is an important driving force for me. I live in Tårnby. Why not do something here? Without my personal history, I couldn't have mustered the persistence for TPS.

The public and the art public

However, what would have happened to me if there had been an independent production house for performance in Copenhagen, like the HAU in Berlin, Kampnagel Hamburg, Gessnerallee Zurich, etc? I was used to these structures from my earlier working life. In the past, I couldn't help but think about my next project and how I could best accommodate it at one of the production houses. A mode of permanent productivity and permanent presence that brought many joys as well as many problems. Nevertheless, the structural routine drove my artistic work forward and got me through financially.

Denmark's “independent” scene is much smaller than the one in the German-speaking region. Co-production houses I was familiar with only exist here on a tiny scale. My first experiences at Theater S/H, where I had done two works when I moved to Denmark, could have shown me how to approach the existing institutions as a freelance artist, look for collaborations and behave in the same way I had done in my earlier years. But I didn't do it back then. The S/H is a place for new productions by independent groups; it likes to create artistic spaces dealing with political issues and is progressive in appearance. But S/H lacked broader structures for creating public space, both in terms of money and physical space. It was hardly feasible acoustically to show two works simultaneously because the performance spaces were so close together. There was no café where people could gather after the performance, and the bar at the time was not an inviting place to hang out.

The lack of an independent production house with international connections is often the subject of internal cultural policy discussions in Copenhagen. In Winter2023/Spring 2024, the Toaster platform, which works at the small Husets Theatre and Det Fri Udstillingsbygning, an exhibition venue, organised a 10 weeks long festival together with Live Art Denmark, during which two performances took place twice a week. There, for the first time since I lived in Denmark, I felt that I was dealing with

an *environment* for contemporary performance. This environment could gather people regularly and could show challenging and special performances. That was the first time I felt the possibility of a working context in an institutional setting that attracted me because of its internationalism, its experimental gesture and the social fun it had. Each time anew, I was curious to see who I would meet on that evening and what kind of artistic proposal would be presented that day. At the same time, this setup seemed to be about the maximum possible in terms of cultural infrastructure and cultural policy for contemporary performance in Copenhagen in the current situation. There wasn't even a closing party. The staff was exhausted. The press barely covered the festival. There were a few online reports and little in the print media. Compared to the 20 partly international performances that were shown, this is puny for a capital city of international importance. And as far as I perceived it at "Managing Discomfort," the audience there was more or less exclusively scene-specific.

Generally, I find the theatre in Denmark to have a strangely isolated status in the public sphere, which I can't quite grasp. However, I'm not alone in this sentiment, and it's not solely because I'm a foreigner. Many students at the Danish National School of Performing Arts, where I teach, have shared these reservations and expressed different aspirations to me. In Copenhagen, there are also ongoing institutional efforts with artist-driven spaces attempting to address the issue in a manner similar to my own practice over these past few years: hand-crafted, small-scale, and collective. The question remains how much these modest initiatives can evolve into a more cohesive, influential force over time.

I longed and still long for a theatre that can be generous. I long for a theatre that can generate beginnings with open ends. A theatre that is not sure what theatre even is and wants to experiment with this, continually questioning itself - in the public eye. I yearn for a theatre that does not confuse "greatness" with "mass," and that is eager to position theatre as a vehicle for public contemplation. A theatre where wildness is not immediately aesthetically controlled, but also allows space for disturbance.

I longed and still long for a theatre where you can "stumble in" and accidentally discover "your" story or something exciting or playful that you simply feel like opening up to. To provoke these moments of incidents is the artistic agenda of Tårnby Park Studio.

Another institutional context in Copenhagen that cannot be overlooked is the CPH Stage Festival. All theatres can participate; there is hardly any curation. What is curated are an international showcase, an emerging platform, some special "highlights", and a few

events for the "industry." CPH Stage has even made it into the national budget. Apparently, this model, which aims to brand Danish Theatre and throw it into the whirlpool of international networking, was convincing for the politicians. CPH Stage is the most stable event in the Danish theatre scene and grows every year. Can anyone feel at home there? When I read the catalogue, I see everything. I have participated before and will be part of it again this year with a performance (2024). One hopes to get a slice of the pie. Who knows.

An unlikely community

I longed and still long for a theatre that experiments with the public. Where have they gone, the theatregoers? Many complain about the loss of visitors. Who lives in the neighborhood? In Tårnby, I enjoy meeting "everyone". Regardless of whether they've been to the theatre before, have any particular idea of what theatre is, or have nothing to do with it in thought or practice. I keep thinking about how an unlikely community can emerge here when you start to knit a public. Between hipness and everyday life, between contemporary brilliance and unconditional enjoyment of encounters.

I longed for and still long for a theatre that is community-building for artists and the local population. I don't know of such a theatre in Copenhagen, apart from other artist-run places like Warehouse 9, which forms an essential function within the queer community. Artist-run spaces in Copenhagen stumble from one bit of funding to the next.

What counts here, and I experience this repeatedly in my function as a lecturer at the Danish National School for Performing Arts, is "the industry". The "industry" is the country's self-reinforcing, self-confirming theatre system, which is difficult to read for someone like me who comes from outside.

I once sat in a round table with many foreign theatre makers, invited by the local platform "Udviklingsplatformen". They all said the same thing: it is difficult or even impossible to find a place in the Danish theatre "industry" as a foreigner. The vast majority of those who find work in the "industry" are educated at the same institution (Danish National School for Performing Arts) and know and communicate with each other. Of course, not all of them are friends. However, there is the experience of a substantial homogeneity that all participants described that evening. A few of the assembled theatre people of foreign origin have fought their way in; most do their own thing.

So I have become one of them here. But the idea of community is still important to me. The idea that theatre should and can have a

place in a political entity (community, city...) is too strong for me not to feel compelled to build this very thing. What will come of it?

What Tårnby Park Studio is and can become is closely linked to the local cultural policies and the existing art institutions. “Local” means Tårnby, but also Copenhagen and Denmark. Tårnby, the municipality in which this Tårnby Park Studio is now formed, does not have a cultural policy like other cities. There is a minimum budget for independent art projects per year, which in total (current status) is less than the cost of a single professional theatre production with two to three actors, with set design, lighting, direction, author, etc. The budget is just over DKK 300,000 (approx. €40,000). That is the annual cultural budget (current status) of Tårnby! You can submit applications here. But I have no illusions now: the money for my work must come from outside Tårnby just like my artistic references and most of my fellow artists. But that doesn't mean that the encounters with the people in Tårnby don't feel right: because here, artists meet something that I can only describe as an extreme everyday experience: a disused public space that can suddenly blossom. Conversely, these approaches develop artistic practice. Anyone who works in Tårnby can learn a lot. It has always been very satisfying and surprising when the TPS has succeeded in experimentally awakening this dormant public space in recent years. Suddenly, very different people appeared and interacted with each other. Suddenly, a space was created in which strangers could sit together and see each other between consuming culture, reflecting, eating and passing the time.

Stability

Think Big. Yesterday, I sat with the board of Civil Sector, the association that runs Tårnby Park Studio, at their annual meeting. We concluded that Tårnby Park Studio could build its own house instead of trying to occupy or obtain empty spaces or entering into precarious agreements with landlords who could kick you out at any time. What could your own home be? How could it be “secured” so that the ideas that drive Tårnby Park Studio do not freeze and die in wood and stone? Would it be possible for Tårnby Park Studio's experiences of productive instability to produce something special and appropriate in a process with many participants - an architecture determined by artistic and social necessities? How could such a house be conceived, built and brought to life? How and with whom could it be shared? How could it become a starting point for artistic collectives and an open and inviting

place for urban society? Which institution with money - if not the state - could be interested in such a project and be persuaded to fund it? Ultimately, like my colleagues, I want stability. Those with stability can generate new, exciting instabilities and breathe visible life into the phantoms that haunt us.

Credits

Many of the sentences in this text begin with "I". It's high time to name those who carry and enrich the Tårnby Park Studio and are or have been part of its activities. To accomplish this, I'm trying to list everyone who was involved from 2023 to June 2024, striving for completeness: Delia Keller and Tanya Rydell Montan are jointly responsible for much enjoyment, as well as Max Morris Doherty, Birgitte Skands, Fran De Pian, FUKK, David Sebastian Lopez, Samling (Helle Egsgaard og Marie Boye Thomsen), Ørestad Koret, Fremtidsklubben (Jacob, Viktoria og Christina Strandgaard Andersen, Nina Marie Sindahl, Ekko og Oona Liebmann, Sherish Saqib), Morten Ammitzbøll, Jørgen Hagen, Dragan Sørensen, Allan Andersen, Einer Lyduch, Martin Erik Dworak, Meet Singh, Per Reichgruber, Knud N. Flensted, Sarkaut Tofiq, Nikolaj Kristensen, Grethe Bille, Gert Adriansen, Matúš Duda, Kenneth Burchhardt, Matthias Loose, Nadja Mattioli, Mette Sangaard Diederiksen, Sophie Grodin, Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt, Helene Filskov Bjerre Jensen, Brian Lykkegard, Paul Doherty, Proletar Teater, Miriam Frandsen, Karin Bergmann, Soma Mamadou, Yeong-Ryan Suh, Sang Gyun Ahn, Emil Torp-Rasmussen, Anna Chonovitch, Tom Silbiger, Boys* in Sync, Ella Östlund, AMOK, Boaz Barkan, Neda Kovinic, Katrina Schellin, Betina Rex, Marianne Klint, Rebecka Berchtold, Amalie Bergstein Nielsen, Tom Silbiger, Denise Lim, Andreas Haglund, Parini Secondo, Signe Vad, Tårnbyhuse, Jeanett Fredin, Diana Planteig, Torben Hansen, Malene Pedersen, Phil Ayres, and many good spirits, colleagues and co-citizens more. Thank you all of you.



Dirk Cieslak, artist. After a 15-year career as a craftsman, with a degree in social sciences in Bremen and London and a research stay in West Africa, Dirk Cieslak founded the theatre group Lubricat in Bremen in 1989. From 1990 to 1992, he worked with Lubricat at the International Culture Factory Kampnagel in Hamburg. In 1993 he moved to Berlin and developed plays at the Volksbühne and Tacheles, among others. In 1996, together with Sasha Waltz and Jo Fabian/Department, he founded Sophiensaele, while continuing to work with Lubricat until 2007; In 2008/9 Cieslak collaborated with Ballhaus Ost and was guest director at Theaterhaus Jena, Schauspiel Leipzig and Theater Magdeburg, among others. In 2010, under the heading of "For a theatre after the project", he founded VIERTE WELT in Berlin, where he still works today.

Marijana Cvetković is a producer, curator and lecturer with a background in art history, cultural policy and cultural management with significant contributions to the social dimensions of culture and art. She has a master's degree in management in culture and cultural policy. She is a co-founder of Station Service for contemporary dance and Nomad Dance Academy, platforms dedicated to the development of contemporary dance and performing arts in the Balkans. She is also co-founder of platforms such as druga scena (other scene), Cultural Centre Magacin, Association of Independent Culture of Serbia, and platform for the Commons "Zajedničko". She lectures at the University of Arts in

Belgrade and the University Lyon 2 as well as many informal education platforms. In 2018 she received the Jelena Šantić award for activism in culture.

Annett Hardegen has been a freelance dramaturge and producer since 2003, based in Berlin. She studied theatre studies, philosophy and art history at the FU-Berlin. As a dramaturge and producer, she has worked for, among others, Sophiensaele Berlin, HAU Berlin, FFT-Düsseldorf, Theaterhaus Jena, Nationaltheater Weimar, Berlin Biennale, Ruhrtriennale and Kaserne Basel. She is co-founder and artistic director of the venue VIERTE WELT, which she runs together with Dirk Cieslak.

Andreas Liebmann is a Swiss performance artist, writer and researcher based in Copenhagen. Currently artistic driver of the site - and municipality-specific place "Tårnby Park Studio", a place for artistic experimentation in close contact with the social context. There he creates festivals, performances, collaborative projects with local and international artists and other neighbours, and a space to reflect on the entanglement of artistic activities with the society. His last research publication "Imaginations for a space" describes the interconnected processes that led to Tårnby Park Studio. Since 2015 he has been a teacher of performance practices and direction at the Danish National School for Performing Arts Copenhagen.

Storm Møller Madsen (they/them) is a performance studies scholar, curator and dramaturg. They are a PhD fellow at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, Section for Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Copenhagen. Their PhD research project explores body-based performance art by transgender artists, with a particular focus on how this genre challenges fundamental understandings of concepts such as affective collectivity, archival activations and bodies on the stage. As a curator and dramaturg, they specialise in issues related to representation, gender and feminist/queer strategies for artistic production.



Artistic Research document
"Phantoms of Stability " by
Andreas Liebmann in conversation
with Marijana Cvetković, Annett
Hardegen & Dirk Cieslak and Storm
Møller Madsen

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Production Symposium

"Phantoms of Stability": Joana
Oehlschläger

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A first reflection partnership
happened at the symposium "Soft
Clashes " in the frame of the Tårnby
Park Performance Festival 2023.
The symposium was moderated
by Morten Goll (Trampoline House,
DK), and invited guests were:
Gylleboverket (SE), Nexus Dance
(DK/SE), På den anden side (DK),
Kinéo 37 (DK). Production: Lara
Ostan Vejrup

