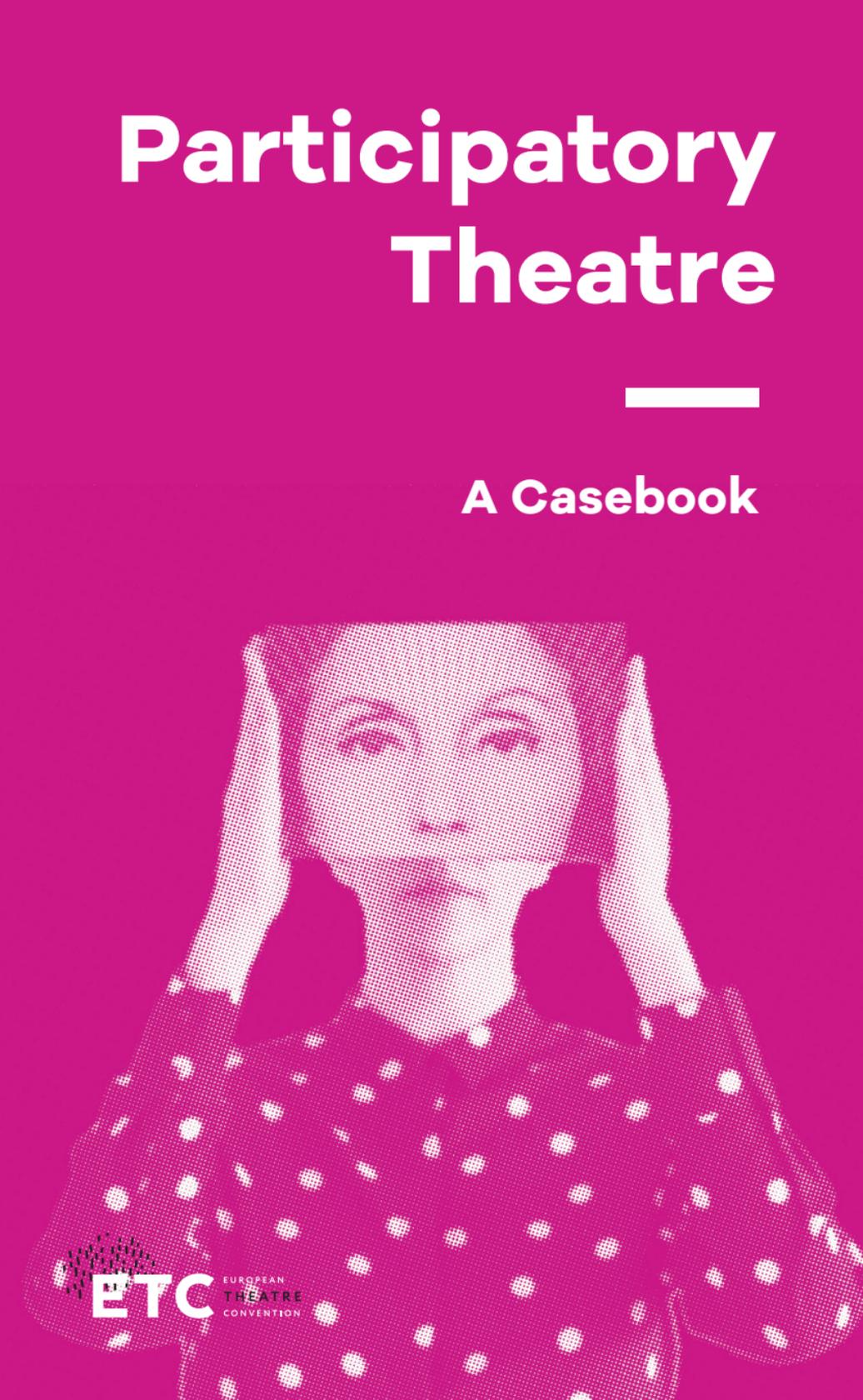


Participatory Theatre

A Casebook



ETC EUROPEAN
THEATRE
CONVENTION

PARTICIPATORY THEATRE

A Casebook

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FOREWORD

Our Stage



BY

HEIDI WILEY & SERGE RANGONI

Participation is a vital cornerstone of citizenship and democracy. However, political participation is on the decline in most Western democracies. As a result, new forms of dialogue are being explored in many countries, to encourage citizens' participation. Participatory theatre has the capacity to be one alternative site of political participation, giving a voice to the voiceless.

Theatre has always been an art and place of public relevance, of identification. Artist Anestis Azas describes applying Rimini Protokoll's 100 per cent performance model to the ancient Greek drama *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus. It is no coincidence that classical Greek theatre, the cradle of European theatre heritage, is still a reference for democratic civil participation in contemporary theatre making.

With the Our Stage programme, ETC focuses on participatory theatre to reach out to, involve and empower existing and new audiences. Our interest lies in the possibilities and challenges of the so-called community or participatory theatre to be created in professional theatre companies. We are interested in initiating the explorative and creative process to enable citizens to take the stage. We are determined to offer public space to participate and to create discourse as an important cornerstone in an open society.

The goal of Our Stage is to promote this theatrical form in European theatres. Since 2018, new works have been created in Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and Austria, with Schauspielhaus Graz having created a new participatory theatre strand under its roof. Our Stage - 4th European Bürgerbühne Festival at Staatsschauspiel Dresden, Germany, presented outstanding participatory theatre performances from across the continent in May 2019. On this occasion, the



ETC International Theatre Conference investigated practical and theoretical aspects of curating and creating this local theatrical form with an international perspective.

Research, reflection and current artistic trends are compiled in this casebook, highlighting a selection of participatory theatre in Europe. It considers effects for theatres working with life-experts, as Rimini Protokoll refers to the involvement of citizens. But above all, it is intended to be an inspiration to further share and initiate new theatre works which engage with audiences through critical theatre making. With much thanks to Creative Europe, the programme for Culture of the European Union, for supporting Our Stage and the diversity of theatrical expressions and empowerment of today's audiences for an open society.

Serge Rangoni
President

Heidi Wiley
Executive Director

Images clockwise: Simon Sharkey, Raquel André, Edit Romankovics (Self-Theatre) and audience at the ETC International Theatre Conference.
© Sebastian Hoppe, Klaus Gigga.

INTRODUCTION

Citizen Participation in Arts and Culture



BY
BIRGIT ERIKSSON

Meanings, Interests, Transformations

Across Europe, there is a demand for institutions to engage citizens as active participants. In the wake of the political and economic crisis of the early 21st century, many social and political institutions seem to have lost legitimacy. This is especially visible in the cross-European rise of populist, anti-institutional and anti-establishment movements—but also in many efforts to reduce these by involving citizens, creating social cohesion, and increasing people’s influence on their own lives.

Cultural institutions are ambiguously situated in this development. On the one hand, they take part in the declining legitimacy of public institutions. European surveys like the Eurobarometer show that citizens participate less in the measured cultural activities, and while cultural life on/with digital platforms increases, the relevance of traditional cultural institutions and their expertise is challenged.

On the other hand, cultural institutions (are asked to) offer alternatives to the declining social cohesion and public engagement. This is a central element of current cultural policies in Europe, and many artists as well as art institutions try to involve a broad spectrum of citizens, to ‘include’ new and maybe marginalized audience groups, and to turn users and audiences into active ‘participants’. The ‘Bürgerbühne’ (citizen stage) is an important example of this focus on participation. But the participatory ambition (from below) and/or imperative (from above) is manifest in all art forms and in many (if not all) of the most important cultural institutions.

Two versions of participation

But what does ‘participation’ mean? In everyday language as well as in the theoretical landscape, the word is used in a

variety of ways, but two understandings stand out. In the first understanding, manifest in everyday language, participation equals being a part of something bigger. You are part of a horizontal whole, which involves shared experiences and identities, and feelings of belonging and community. You can participate in a specific group, subculture or event. This horizontal understanding is frequently used in the cultural sector where participation in a given cultural activity or institution is promoted and measured—motivated by (commercial) interests in increasing audience numbers and/or by the idea of cultural participation as a general human right and need. This idea has been an important premise for cultural policy since it was articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948): *“Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts”*.

Neither this declaration nor its implementation in cultural policies, however, has hindered participation in the arts and culture from remaining unequal. Many people (still) do not participate in legitimate culture. The acknowledgement of this inequality led to a new declaration, the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001) where *“all persons have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices”*. Here, the idea of a common, unified culture of the community is replaced with a recognition of the highly diverse forms of cultural practices and belongings within communities. In particular, it emphasizes the importance of recognising people’s own decisions, practices and ownership in the cultural field.

This leads us to the second—democratic—understanding of participation. This understanding is not about horizontal belonging to a whole but about the distribution of power.

In an influential half-century-old definition by the political scientist Carole Pateman, participation is a right and a means to have *“equal power to determine the outcome of decisions”*. This understanding of the concept is used in political theory where meaningful participation is defined as sharing power. But it is also used beyond democratic institutions in the narrow sense, often followed by arguments that participatory processes involve interests and conflicts, and that citizen participation requires visible citizen influence on or even control with decisions, resources and outcomes. Ownership, power and agency are key elements in this democratic understanding of the concept, where one often distinguishes between partial vs. full participation, manipulation vs. citizen control, or fake vs. true participation.

Motivations for participation

So why is this important, and what does it have to do with citizen participation in arts and culture? Well, when participation is so high on the agenda in contemporary culture—when we witness a demand for and interest in engaging citizens as active participants—then we need to know which understanding of participation is in play: What kind of participation do the various actors aim at, and with what kind of motivations? Is the interest in citizen participation caused by problems of loneliness, marginalisation, isolation and lack of social cohesion? In that case, it refers to the first, horizontal understanding of participation, and the suggested solution will normally be to facilitate inclusion and social interaction and thereby to generate or strengthen belonging and community.

But citizen participation also pops up as an answer to growing feelings of frustration, powerlessness, demotivation or desperation generated by growing inequality, exclusion, and opaque

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When participation is so high on the agenda in contemporary culture ... then we need to know which understanding of participation is in play.

The difference is visible in the two universal declarations of human right and cultural diversity. In the first declaration, participation refers to being part of the community and to share the experiences and enjoyment of arts and culture. The problem for this understanding of the concept arises when a significant part of the population does not take part in these experiences and enjoyment. Repeated attempts to reduce the economic, geographical and physical obstacles for participation has not made everyone use their declared right to participate in arts and culture. The explanation of this has traditionally been based on a 'deficit model'—that the 'non-users' of arts and culture lack knowledge, competences or similar. But if we shift to the other understanding of participation—and the other declaration's emphasis on influence and ownership—an obvious explanation may also be that they feel excluded from and powerless in the cultural institutions, and that they therefore simply prefer to do something else. They are, as the most frequent answer in

hierarchies of power. In that case, the answer will be to strengthen the empowering involvement of citizens in equal decision-making and to focus on questions of voice, influence and agency. This refers to the second and democratic understanding of the concept of participation, and emphasize people's right and need to have influence on their own lives.

the surveys indicates, not interested. They do not feel that they belong, or that they have any influence on what is going on. And more often than not, they are right. Even though many contemporary art projects aim at being socially engaged, subversive or anti-authoritarian, this is often seen from a very different perspective than that of the citizens.

Transforming cultural institutions?

Cultural institutions may be engaged in one or the other understanding of participation. They may—and this is very common—try to make the institution more open and inclusive. This happens for instance when the institutions try to give new and old audiences a sense of belonging and shared identity by offering various loyalty programmes and social events. They make particular clubs for young audiences and offer nights at the museum or theatre with talks, music, drinks and socialising. These and similar participatory initiatives are clearly based on the horizontal understanding of participation and does not really challenge the vertical hierarchies in the institutions. They try to give people a good time and make them belong but not to give them influence.

Sometimes, the participatory agenda can also more radically transform the cultural institutions and their users. In some institutions—and in quite a few artistic projects—citizens participate not only in cultural activities but also contribute to these in ways that make a visible difference. Thereby they also challenge traditional professional practices and established distinctions between institution and citizen, professional and user, expert knowledge and everyday experience, cultural sector and other sectors. These transformations are highly interesting but participation is not always positive. We just

need to look at contemporary digital culture where new participatory repertoires have evolved and social media lives on user involvement and user-generated content. While social media in the early phase seemed to promise emancipation, democracy and empowerment, the more problematic sides of the new participatory practices soon appeared. They did not make us all creative, free and equal produces but increasingly connote addiction, surveillance, commercial exploitation and an unprecedented concentration of power.

On a smaller scale, participation in arts and culture is also ambiguous. It can be transformative and empowering when citizens engage in art projects and institutions. But when participation is everywhere, it becomes necessary to ask if people participate in decision-making or only in activities, and if they undertake tasks rather than influence goals. How much, for instance, is decided in advance when they enter the stage in the Bürgerbühne? Are they offered a chance to participate in an activity and a community, or are they also able to question this activity, the form it takes, and what holds the community together? Both aspects of participation are important. Or the other way around: the concept and phenomenon of participation is important exactly because it combines shared experiences and community with shared decision-making and empowerment. □

This text was originally published in the Our Stage – 4th European Bürgerbühne Festival documentation, 2019, by Staatschauspiel Dresden and Miriam Tscholl.

Image top: Hillbrowfication by Constanza Macras (Germany/South Africa) at Our Stage – 4th European Bürgerbühne Festival. © Themba.

Image bottom: The Fan Man or How to Dress an Elephant by En Dymeai Theatre Ensemble & Eleni Efthymiou (Greece) at Our Stage – 4th European Bürgerbühne Festival. © Dionysis Metaxas.



European Formats of Participatory Theatre

Participatory theatre formats have spread significantly across Europe in recent years. Parallel to Germany, where numerous “Bürgerbühnen” and similar models have been founded, different **European approaches to participatory theatre**, as well as questions of audience involvement and socially engaged theatre, can be explored throughout Belgium, Greece, Romania, Portugal and many other countries. Artists Tunde Adefioye, Edit Romankovics, Raquel André and Anestis Azas share their experiences and best practices.



*Top: Clean City by Anestis Azas (Athens/Greece). © Christina Georgiadou.
Middle: Long Live Regina! by Self-Theatre (Hungary). © Gabriella Csozó.
Bottom: Telemachos – Should I Stay or Should I Go? by Anestis Azas (Berlin/Germany). © Benjamin Krieg.*

Old Tools Greater Than New Masters Does Not Equal New Futures



BY
TUNDE ADEFIOYE

The title of this piece alludes to a production created together with some young people in Manchester at Contact Theatre. I'd like to give you an overview of the theoretical starting points that I use to inform the work that I do at the KVS (Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg, Brussels/Belgium).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term that is currently being bantered around more and more. Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, a professor of law and critical race theory at UCLA and Columbia University, coined the term in the 80's while she was working on a law case. Even before that point, intersectionality has always been a thing. You had people like Claudia Jones, Paul Robeson, Audre Lorde and James Baldwin who have embodied intersectionality.

The three women who initiated the Black Lives Matter movement, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi and Patrisse Cullors, have been crucial in the understanding of intersectionality over the past 7 years. I encourage you to check out their website and their platform statement, as part of the work they do is about the idea of diffused leadership models; a concept which I find very interesting for our cultural sector. This is an extract from

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Participatory is not just about bringing individuals in and showing their traditional dances, but it's about how it shapes the working structure of the institution.

their statement which embodies intersectionality, especially as we live it in 2019:

“We believe in elevating the experiences and leadership of the most marginalised black people, including but not limited to those who are women, queer, trans, femmes, gender non-conforming, Muslim, formally and currently incarcerated, cash-poor and working-class, disabled, undocumented and immigrants. In recent years we have taken to the streets, launched massive campaigns and impacted elections but our elected leaders have failed to address the legitimate demands of our movement. We recognise that not all of our collective needs and visions can be translated into policy but we understand that policy change is one of many tactics necessary to move us towards the world we envision. We can no longer wait.”

In 2016, using this concept of intersectionality, Sabrina Mahfouz was approached to be one of the first artists to lead SLOW—Slam Our World. Michael De Cock, artistic director of the KVS, asked me to create something using slam poetry that worked through to theatre and SLOW was a result of that brainstorm. An artist like Sabrina Mahfouz, who is Egyptian and British based in London, is invited for a three-week residency in Brussels. In those three weeks, they meet with local actors, local players and a diverse array of individuals. With each SLOW, we ask a different question. The question in 2016 was “In the context of Brussels, what is Muslim feminism?”. As many might remember, 2016 was the year bombings took place in Brussels. The question was pertinent then and one that we need to continue to ask ourselves. Those who understand intersectionality will know that question is looking at the intersection between gender, religion and ethnicity.

Also, in this type of project, it’s important to make sure

that the power dynamics really shift. That it’s not me as a city dramaturg, as part of the artistic team of the KVS, determining the layout of the whole project. That it is Sabrina Mahfouz, together with the individuals she meets along the way, determining the outcome of the project.

Another way that intersectionality seeped into our programming was in October 2017 with *Beyond the Binary* when we asked The Warrior Poets, a Brussels-based queer (lesbian) organisation inspired by Audre Lorde, to curate a night looking at the intersection of queer identity, ethnicity, gender and class. The Warrior Poets, a collective of two women, invited a Somali poet, a femme dancer/performer from Afghanistan (both based in Amsterdam), and the London-based collective Sorry You Feel Uncomfortable, who pretty much took over the KVS box space. It really shifted the way the KVS team worked. I remember my colleague from the technical team saying “I’ve never worked like this before... I’m amazed at the outcome and I’m really glad that we got to do this type of project in the KVS”. Participatory is not just about bringing individuals in and showing their traditional dances, but it’s about how it shapes the working structure of the institution—from the technicians, to the communication, to the artistic team.

Decolonisation, Anti-Colonisation and Post-Colonisation

The next theory that I would like to frame for you is the understanding of decolonisation, anti-colonisation and post-colonisation. Like intersectionality, these are hot buzz words these days and the circle that you are in, determines how you feel about these terms.

I was at an important school in Antwerp that trains

actors and theatre makers (I won't name names) where I was supposed to start teaching in 2019/2020. In my first meeting I met one of my future colleagues. I had been informed that a student of colour had decided to no longer attend his class. He said, "Yeah, she doesn't come to my class anymore" and I replied, "Wow, you're very flippant about this reality, you should be worried". The coordinator said "She doesn't go to the class anymore because he used the n-word". That's problematic and that's something that we need to take seriously. For that student who is a young Moroccan woman, hearing this white man in his late 60s using the n-word is a form of aggression and she doesn't feel safe in that space.

Later, the other coordinator told me "In addition to asking you and others to come and teach this class, we would also like to organise a symposium. But we're not going to call the symposium 'decolonisation' because it's an aggressive word." I don't use the term all the time but it's an important term in relation to the work I do, how I see myself and where I come from.

Professor Gloria Wekker, former head of the Gender Studies department at Utrecht University, wrote the book *White Innocence*. I encourage you to read it because it looks at the Dutch context in terms of colonisation and how the colonial project still informs society today. Part of what she says is, "An unacknowledged reservoir of knowledge and affects based on four hundred years of Dutch imperial rule plays a vital but unacknowledged part in dominant meaning-making process, including the making of the self, taking place in Dutch society". Replace Dutch society with German society. Replace German society with French society. Replace French society with Belgian society. You get the point—there's a lot of work that needs to be done.

Exotification

The last term that I would like to address is 'exotification'. Hillbrowfication is a perfect example. Professor Joachim Ben Yakoub, who is Tunisian-Belgian, said in relation to Moussem festival, "In his study *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said warns not to underestimate the consequences of a widespread internalisation and reproduction of the dominating Western cultural discourses embedded in the canon. Can one thus construct a new consciousness, as proposed by the festival..". Maybe one can also apply it to this festival in Dresden. He continues "by referring time and again to a normative body of work and normative concepts without reproducing the entrenched historical power relations?". Some of you might be wondering or maybe not be wondering "why is Hillbrowfication a problem?". I don't know the background; I don't even know the artist and I wish I had time to talk to them. But it's a problem to me because I see inherently a problematic power relation in terms of who gets to decide where the money comes from and who gets to decide what is done with that money. Hopefully we try to move away from that type of exotification, if not exploitation.

In closing, living in a context like Brussels, it is no longer okay to have an ensemble, to have a theatre company, to have one of the most important theatre institutions in Flanders be non-representative. The ensemble of the KVS today consists of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, different countries, because it's important that the people on stage reflect the people that live in the city. It's crucial that in 2019 and beyond, your ensemble looks like this. It is a result of looking at who has the power and resources from the major institutions to tell the stories that they want to tell and how they want to tell them.

I want to share a quote from Bell Hooks' essay *Eating the Other*: "The desire to make contact with those bodies deemed other, with no apparent will to dominate, assuages the guilt of the past. Even takes the form of a defiant gesture where one denies accountability and historical connection... The desire is not to make the other over in one's image but to become the other".

I was asked to talk about city dramaturgy and I hope that you have a better understanding of the work that's being done at the KVS. But I also found it crucial—because I knew what my audience would look like—to ask critical questions that hopefully make you question the work that you do, how you do the work and the space and power that you occupy. □

This keynote was presented during the ETC International Theatre Conference, Dresden in May 2019.



Images:

ETC International Theatre Conference: Tunde Adefioye,
Miriam Tscholl (bottom). © Klaus Gigga.

Long Live Regina!



BY
EDIT ROMANKOVICS

It should be noted from the outset that the performance *Long Live Regina!* is part of a complex, art-based research project that uses different methods such as sociodrama and digital storytelling. In this text, I will focus on the devising process of *Long Live Regina!*, which was created within this framework.

At Self-Theatre, we use the term ‘autoethnographic theatre’ for participatory plays, since they are based on the personal stories of a minority group with specific social experiences.

It is important to say that, in Hungary, the Roma are among the poorest and most oppressed people. In the performance, Roma women tell their personal stories about motherhood and the Hungarian healthcare system. They all live in the small village of Szomolya, in the poorest region of Hungary, located in the northeast.

Since such a participatory theatre project raises many different professional questions, I would like to address five important aspects of our devising process: the goals, the team, the methods, the locations and the audience.

Goals

The aim of the performance *Long Live Regina!* was to give a space and a voice to people who are oppressed; to give them an opportunity to speak for themselves in a public place rather than being spoken about by others.

For me, theatre is both a social event and a moral institution; a place of communication and education. Its purpose is to speak about today’s social problems. In Hungary, all segments of society are imbued in authoritarian or hierarchical thinking, which brings about social injustice and oppression. And I believe it is precisely here that the task of the theatre lies:

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For me, theatre is both a social event and a moral institution; a place of communication and education.

to bring these problems and inequalities to the fore.

Long Live Regina! is a model or an opportunity for emancipating and equalising society and theatre. It is an opportunity to see ourselves and the actions happening onstage from a new perspective.

Team

What kind of experts are needed in the participatory theatre process? A project of this nature requires working with people from various fields. Our team was very diverse, which was challenging to be sure, but also rewarding. We all learned to coordinate and discuss our different approaches to the project in order to reach a common goal. The manager of the project was a cultural anthropologist (Kata Horváth); the professional staff was made up of a local social worker (Iréne Lázár Györgyné), a sociodrama expert (Judith Teszáry), a digital storytelling expert (Anita Lanszki), two professional actors (Lilla Sárosdi, Fruzsina Háda), a dramaturg (Eszter Gyulai), a photographer (Gabriella Csozó), an assistant (Orsolya Fóti) and me, Edit Romankovics, the director and an expert in theatre pedagogy.

Methods

We worked for nine months on *Long Live Regina!* The first six months involved community development and the collection of material. During that time we worked with two methods: sociodrama and digital storytelling. After this period, the

script of the performance was written. Using the material we collected, we chose one central question and twelve stories, and the play was built around them.

In theatre, directors are traditionally at the top of the hierarchy: they are the ones in power. But that doesn't work in participatory and community theatre. It was a serious challenge in our performance, as the women had come from a totally different social class from me. As a middle-class Hungarian woman, my presence generated distrust and opposition since I was one of the oppressors. During the rehearsals, we put a great deal of effort into creating an atmosphere of trust to ensure the actors knew that this performance was for them and represented their interests. As a creative team, we brought our professional experience to the table above all for them, not for our own self-fulfilment.

The rehearsal process required me to be flexible and perform ongoing coordination work. I had to be ready for changes when the process took another direction. I needed to prepare for rehearsals that took different perspectives into account and be open to new ideas. I had to adapt to the mood and dynamics of the group as well as to the individual needs of the group members. This process is mainly based on partnership and equality, in which the role of the director is to facilitate and help. It was very different from any traditional way of directing.

Locations and Audience

During the devising process, we asked ourselves two questions: Where, and in what context, is it worth performing this play? And: What sort of audience is it worth putting on the performance for? Our first show was in the village of Szomolya,

where the women live. The second performance was at the university of the nearby town, Eger. The third was at one of the theatres in Budapest. Later, we performed in the countryside for a Roma audience and were invited to professional theatre festivals.

We always performed the play in front of different groups of spectators and after every show we had a talk with the audience, which was a way for us to involve them in the theatrical communication. It also meant that the audience chose the discussion topics, which gave us a wide range of impressions given that we played in front of so many people with different social backgrounds.

Regarding these last two aspects, one of the actresses in the performance, Zsanett Horváth, shares her personal experience here:

“Our first performance was in Szomolya, my village, which is actually our village, the performers’ village. It has a population of 1,600 people. Everybody knows everybody. The biggest issue in our village is shame. Everything is shameful. It was the hardest of all of our performances. Just to be speaking openly in front of our families and neighbours about issues that we are all aware of but don’t speak about. After the first performance, we all cried, and I think it was because we could really prove that we are not only good for cleaning houses and washing things, but are able to perform and do worthy things.

Another performance was in Trafó, a theatre in Budapest. Here it was also an opportunity to prove ourselves and speak up about important issues like what is happening in the healthcare system, to us and to others, but maybe especially to us. Later on, we put on a performance in Roma communities in the Hungarian countryside. Our goal there was more about helping the people by

telling stories. And that was the idea of the experience: to share stories, recognise similarities and see that we are not alone with our stories, that they are not shameful. It makes people stronger. It was a very new feeling for us that we could help other people just by telling stories.

I think that the most important thing I got out of this process is self-confidence. I realised that we are not alone in our own social setting or family, and that we can talk to other people without shame while learning from these interactions and experiences.” □

This presentation was given as part of a panel talk on “European Formats of Participatory Theatre”, during the ETC International Theatre Conference, Dresden in May 2019.

Collection of People



BY
RAQUEL ANDRÉ

I'm a collector. In 2014, I started collecting people. Collection of People is a long-term project made up of four collections: lovers, collectors, artists and spectators. All my collections are about the ephemeral, things that are impossible to keep, and finding ways to collect people. For my collections, I create theatre shows, performances, books, exhibitions, workshops and films. My first collection is of lovers. I set up meetings with strangers in their houses. We have to take at least one photo that demonstrates intimacy. After the first meeting, I realised there had to be a second meeting, and after that a third and so on. Today I count 230 lovers. All of them are of different ages, nationalities, genders. To date, I have collected lovers in 24 cities, from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro, Bergen to Cincinnati, Buenos Aires to Geneva. I never knew who I was going to meet. No one else is there besides us, the camera and the tripod. It is the lover who suggests what picture is taken. The question central to the work is: What is intimacy for you?

I decided to collect lovers for ten years. I thought that a decade would be the minimum amount of time needed to see what ends up changing within this question and how this question changes me. I'm in the fifth year now and have around 7,000 pictures. In every city I pass through, I collect more lovers.

The second collection is the *Collection of Collectors*. It is a collection of people who share their obsession of collecting with me. How can you get to know someone through their

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“Collection of People” is my way of participating and inviting others to participate. It is my participatory life.

collections? What memories can an object carry? It all started in 2016, in the north of Portugal. So far, I have collected 36 collectors in Germany, Belgium and several cities in Portugal. I have spent hours with each collector and recorded everything on video. I do not leave any of the collectors' houses without bringing an object from their collection with me: something to tell their story, that reminds me of our meeting. Something to remind my memory of the experience we had together.

My other two collections are currently in progress. One of them is the *Collection of Spectators*. In all the projects of collecting people, I collect spectators. The spectators are invited to start a direct relationship with me, which generates visual, textual and object archives. They send me photos, objects, letters, magazines and videos. This collection initiates a conversation between the work and its witnesses, who let themselves be affected by it. And it never stops accumulating. In the collection, I show people reading the book *Collection of Lovers Vol. 1*, watching a TV version of *Collection of Lovers*, visiting the *Collection of Lovers* exhibition at the Cincinnati Contemporary Art Centre and more than 600 objects from 40 performances of *Collection of Collectors*, which spectators had given to me during the show. This is the archive for a performance to premiere in 2021.

Right now, I'm working on the *Collection of Artists*. It is possible to access the artist, their story, in a moment of a creation. In the question of artists, my proposal is to use my own body as an archive. How can my body memorise someone? *Collection of Artists* is about each artist. There are different practices, conceptual perspectives and different working tools. It is also about their personal desires and lifestyles, showing the relationship between what they do and who they are.

To date, I have collected 17 artists from different nationalities, among them a contemporary dancer, a musician from a classical orchestra, a painter, a sculptor, a hip-hopper, a theatre director, an actress, a performer, a circus artist, etc. This is only a glimpse of my collection of people, my collection of ephemeral things, my collection of things that seem impossible to keep.

Oscar Wilde once said: "*It is not art that imitates life, but life that imitates art*". I believe in the possibility of living artistically. *Collection of People* is a way of doing that. If it were not for this artistic project, I would not be able to meet these people, I would not be able to get into their homes, I would not be affected by them and their stories. In the last five years, it has become my way of approaching people and places. And to turn it into my work of art is a privilege and a great pleasure. But most of all it is a way of being. In *Living as Form*, Nato Thompson starts by quoting Foucault, who said: "*What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life, that art is something which is specialised or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art?*" I say the answer is yes.

Collecting people is a methodology for artistic composition, a way of writing and telling stories. For me it is a question of perspective, yes: we are all lovers, collectors, artists and spectators. Because we all have a story that draws us closer together; that, in all its differences, and peculiarities becomes a narrative. And it is a great compositional tool and source of content creation for the theatre. Claire Bishop wrote the following about delegated performance: "*This type of performance in which the artist uses other people as the material of his or her work tends to occasion heated debate about the*

ethics of her presentation.” Everyone who I collect consents to being collected. Everyone knows that our meeting is an artistic meeting. They all know that the show will be based on the meeting. And they all get involved until they have understood what their limits are. I invite these people to have an experience. An experience to which they consent.

For me, the meetings with the collected people are themselves performances and artistic work. We both attempt to collect what cannot be collected, believing that it may be possible to collect someone as part of an artistic work. I am collecting people to make a work of art, so right now it has become my way of living and a part of my history. *Collection of People* is my way of participating and inviting others to participate. It is my participatory work and history. It is my participatory life. □

This presentation was given as part of a panel talk on “European Formats of Participatory Theatre”, during the ETC International Theatre Conference, Dresden in May 2019.



Images:

Collection of Lovers by Raquel André (Lisbon/Portugal).

© Top: Susana Neves; Bottom: Raquel André.

Documenting the Crisis



BY
ANESTIS AZAS

Working in documentary theatre (aka reality theatre) and other participatory forms of theatre began for my colleague Prodromos Tsinikoris and me as a direct result of the influence of the German directors' group Rimini Protokoll. In 2010, both of us were working as assistant directors on *Prometheus* in Athens, a theatrical project involving 103 residents¹ of the city of Athens. The production applied the Rimini Protokoll's *100 per cent* performance model to the ancient Greek drama *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus. Over the following few years – it has been almost ten years since then – we developed our own projects in this genre, and this work of ours evolved alongside the ongoing economic and political crisis in our country. I would like to reflect on this process by using three previous projects as examples.

In July 2011, as part of International Athens and Epidauros Theatre Festival and its platform for young and emerging local theatre groups, we developed our first play in this genre: *Journey by Train*.

The performance was staged inside the headquarters of the Greek railway company, which was still public at the time, in a hall where the board of directors normally met. The collapse of the Greek railway company was the focus of the performance, with six railway workers (who held various positions within the company's hierarchy) and a singer from the railway workers' choir as our protagonists. A once powerful organisation, the railway had fallen deep into debt by that time and was slated to be privatised, like so many other public service organisations in Greece. With the country's financial crisis escalating, it was also a time of great social and political upheaval. In 2011, for instance, huge anti-government demonstrations took

place in Syntagma Square during the same period when we were rehearsing this show. It was indeed a strange moment in history when the mass media in both Greece and abroad accused “corrupt” public service employees for the bankruptcy of the state.

Our work stemmed primarily from our struggle to understand what exactly was happening in our country. Seeing the problems facing the Greek railway, we tried to deepen our understanding of the entire public sector and to distil onstage both the causes and consequences of the country’s crisis. We began with field research, doing extensive interviews with people who used to work at the railway, and invited some of them to participate onstage. In rounds of script work, we developed these interviews and created a final text that the protagonists eventually went on to perform themselves.

In this way, our performance had a strong activist character and we discovered in the process how important it was for real people to be protagonists and speak in public about their reality, using the stage as a public political space. For us as a directing team, a crucial point became clear for our work: our job was to make different points of view and opinions visible, and to develop narratives other than those that were dominant in the public sphere at the time.

In the years that followed, we continued to work in this way, defining and refining our methods and goals. Especially when working on projects about immigration, it became increasingly clear that we had to focus on politics in our performances.

Telemachos – Should I stay, or should I go? opened in Berlin at the Ballhaus Naunynstraße performing arts centre in 2013. The performance was an onstage confrontation between two

generations of Greek immigrants in Germany: Greeks who emigrated in the 1960s as *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) and Greeks who emigrated in the twenty-first century due to the Greek economic crisis. Prodromos Tsinikoris, who played the main character, used his personal story as a dramaturgical base. As the son of Greek immigrants from Wuppertal, having lived half his life in Germany and the other half in Greece, while on stage he asked whether he should stay in Germany or go back and fight for the political soul of Greece. The question could be read both ways since Prodromos was in Greece at the time. Should he leave the bankrupt country and seek a better life in Germany like his parents had in the past? The question does not necessarily need to be answered. As a quandary that undoubtedly troubles all immigrants, it is posed in order to elicit stories of people who have lived their lives between (at least) two countries.

When we researched and rehearsed the play, prejudice against Greeks as lazy and corrupt was bubbling through the German media. In our play, we tried to give a face to the crisis, to make specific stories visible by showing ambivalent characters and personal stories onstage in hopes of provoking a discourse about the German-Greek relationship, which was also in crisis at the time.

Our most well-known play, *Clean City*—which is still on tour, and, in fact, happens to be one of the longest-running international Greek performances to date (42 cities)—opened in February 2016 at the Stegi Theatre in the Onassis Cultural Centre in Athens. Influenced by Shermin Langhoff’s post-migrant theatre concept, which staged stories about Germany from the perspective of people who live there without any

German heritage, we decided to do something similar in Greece. And so, after *Telemachos – Should I stay or should I go?*, we came back to Greece during a time when the neo-fascist Golden Dawn party was rising politically, having won 7% in the elections with their slogan promise “to clean the country” of foreigners and others who were, in their opinion, “impure”. In Greek, “katharos-kathari” means both “clean” and “pure”. Thus, the slogan is a pretty direct reference to the Nazi idea of a pure race. Turning this around, we read the slogan literally, asking “Who is, in fact, really cleaning this country?”. The people who literally spend their days cleaning hotels, houses and offices are mostly foreign workers, of course. The very people the Golden Dawn party wanted to get rid of. Thus, we began work on *Clean*

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... I would describe reality theatre as a way of gathering and displaying knowledge from the source, especially when dealing with political and social issues.

City by interviewing immigrant communities in Athens, starting with the women who clean the big theatres. They ended up becoming our protagonists.

A few months later, we were designing the poster of the play when we came up with the idea of showing our protagonists as superheroes:

the antithesis of victims. Our dramaturg was feminist activist Margarita Tsomou, who was an editor at Missy magazine at the time. She was aware of the danger of presenting our characters as victims and insisted that they be shown as empowered

individuals whose decision to move to another country was an authoritative one: a decision that changes the world. *Clean City* shows Greece from the perspective of its immigrant cleaners as our five protagonists (Mable Matshidiso Mosana, Rositsa Pandalieva, Fredalyn Resurreccion-Hellrung, Drita Shehi and Valentina Ursache) share their experiences of cleaning the homes of the Greek upper middle class and face deep societal racism at the same time. In the process, they become an uncomfortable mirror for the Greek audience, but always perform with sovereignty and humour.

Looking back on these projects and our resulting method, I would describe reality theatre as a way of gathering and displaying knowledge from the source, especially when dealing with political and social issues. It is a simple, direct way of gaining access to the people, problems and contradictions of everyday life, and of developing a three-dimensional portrait of reality that provides a stark and necessary contrast to the typical black-and-white dramaturgy and mentality that we see so often in the media² and that has dominated the discussion of the Greek crisis over the past few years.

We have come to understand the stage as a space to take a position and develop and cultivate political consciousness. □

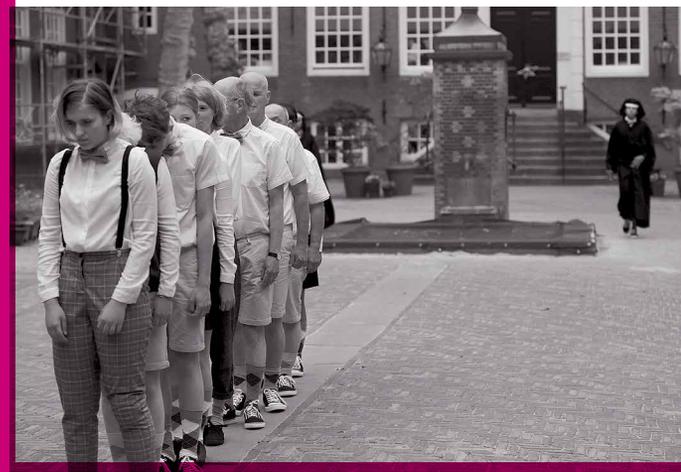
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¹ Three unregistered immigrants were added to the 100 Athenians representing the city.

² As the term ‘media’ appears many times in this text, it is important to point out that in Greece many important newspapers collapsed during the crisis, leaving just a few profit-oriented media outlets, all run by a handful of oligarchs with specific agendas.

Our Stage – Participatory and Citizen Stages Across Europe

Our Stage introduces the idea of Bürgerbühne (literally citizens' stage)—which is run the same way as a professional inhouse production company but involves non-professional actors—as a new form of creative community outreach via artistic collaboration and as a new production model. Within the European Theatre Convention's programme Our Stage, city and state theatres from Graz (Austria), Parma (Italy), Szombathely (Hungary) and Amsterdam (Netherlands) have developed outstanding projects in participatory theatre.



Top: Jongens van hier
by Eva Knibbe. (Amsterdam/Netherlands)
© Sanne Peper.
Bottom: Schöne neue Welt: Träumen Androiden von elektrischen Schafen?
by Anja Michaela Wohlfahrt (Graz/Austria). © Lupi Spuma.

Bürger*innen- bühne



BY
TIMO STAAKS

Three productions featuring 56 actors and attracting 2,463 spectators to 23 performances at three different stages. This past exciting year has made one thing clear: Citizens' Stage (or Bürger*innenbühne), has arrived in Graz and is here to stay!

In keeping with our season motto of "Zukunft/Die Welt von Morgen" (Future/The World of Tomorrow) the 2018/2019 season focused on transformation, reinvention, and the reconsideration of long-standing traditions. But rather than merely exploring the motto in terms of content, as had been the case in previous seasons, our theatre—the largest and most important theatrical institution of the Austrian state of Styria and its capital, Graz—actually launched an entirely new department devoted to citizens theatre, taking a concrete step towards a future (theatre) that is geared even more strongly towards participation. Our overriding vision was to show the stories of "real" people and have these stories embodied onstage by the very same people.

Having amateurs onstage was no novelty for the Schauspielhaus; after all, we had offered educational and development projects in the past. But treating a citizens stage production "just like any other production"—as Miriam Tscholl, head of the pioneering citizens stage at Staatsschauspiel Dresden, stipulated—was a new departure for the Schauspielhaus. The decision to do the project at all meant great challenges for this highly specialised theatre. Especially since artistic director Iris Laufenberg decided to not just contribute a single production to Our Stage, but to launch the citizens stage with a bang: in this case, with three large-scale productions addressing the topic of 'the future'.

From the beginning, the list of questions—especially those regarding the project's implementation within the theatre's established operating structures—was extensive:

What is the relationship between the artistic work and existing forms of drama? What exactly are we expecting to present: documentary theatre, performance or representational theatre? What can amateurs do onstage that trained actors cannot? What conditions do we need to provide for amateurs who have a busy life e.g. a family and/or a full-time job? What are the topics we want them to address? Should the actors' stories be put to existing plays or should the pieces be devised? Who should be on the directing teams and what skill sets do they need? What kind of support will the directing teams need in order to accommodate this special situation? How can we communicate this new format to the outside world and reach the people we are looking for—both the actors and the audience? How can we encourage our core audience to throw (some of) their previous viewing expectations out the window? What are the audience's, the actors' and our theatre company's expectations? Can a project like this be integrated into the (subscription-based) programme of a repertoire theatre at all? What kind of box office results can we expect?

We had one great advantage upon embarking on our endeavour: as a member of the ETC, we had the opportunity to take part in an international exchange that focused on these questions from the outset. Interested and/or cooperating theatres met at the nucleus of the German-language citizens stage movement, Staatsschauspiel Dresden, as guests of Miriam Tscholl. Her experience in this field proved invaluable for us. In addition, our exchange with friends at other theatres not only demonstrated a wide range of international views on the issue of amateurs on professional stages, but also resulted in new thoughts and ideas. With this encouragement, we soon took action, ventured from theory into practice and made decisions.

Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World* and the questions it raises became thematic anchors for the three productions we set out to create. *Schöne neue Welt: Leonce und Lena suchen einen Ausweg* (Brave New World: Leonce and Lena Look for a Way Out), directed by Simon Windisch, addressed the phenomena of burnout and bore-out, and the question of future work cultures. *Schöne neue Welt: Träumen Androiden von elektrischen Schafen?* (Brave New World: Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?), directed by Anja Michaela Wohlfahrt, showed people who are already working on the tomorrow's world today. And, at the end of the season, *Schöne Neue Welt: Familie 2.0* (Brave New World: Family 2.0), directed by Uta Plate, explored the crucial issue of the contract between generations and family ties of the future.

A transparent flow of information to the Schauspielhaus's technical departments and offices has proven indispensable. It was only after an internal programme conference, which outlined the purpose, intended methods, added value and existing experiences of this project, and traced its motivation and vision (opening them up for debate, too), that everyone felt they were on the same page. And with good reason, since it turned out that the citizens stage involved a new approach and a significant amount of extra work

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Treating this production “just like any other production” also meant having to be flexible, make frequent exceptions and respond to needs and requirements.

for many colleagues. Because treating this production “just like any other production” also meant having to be flexible, make frequent exceptions and respond to needs and requirements as they arose.

One example was the rehearsal period. Rehearsals for a conventional production usually take place twice a day for a period of six weeks, whereas the production periods for our amateur productions had to be extended significantly. The rehearsal periods of our citizens stage ranged from a brisk 7.5 weeks at our smallest space to 13 weeks for the production on our largest stage. For this reason, the latter production was not included in the regular repertoire schedule, but was presented en suite as part of a small citizens stage festival, where our neighbouring ETC colleagues from Szombathely also presented their own citizens stage production. This en suite presentation was a rare occurrence in our theatre, which normally operates in repertoire.

Even before the premiere of the first production, it became evident that our existing communication channels for press work and social media were not adequate. So we returned to a form of communication that we had almost forgotten: we went outside and just talked to people. We explained and canvassed; we created networks with influential people who would spread the news about our project.

Once the players had found their way to us, we felt that the most important thing to do was involve them in the theatre’s day-to-day operations as best we could. We did not want our invitation to “become members of the Graz theatre family” to be empty words, so we organised an initial tour of the theatre, guided by the theatre’s head dramaturg. We issued staff badges and invited the players to the Christmas party of the theatre employees.

We also had to consider the rehearsal processes, especially regarding the staffing of the core team. Aside from getting assistance from as many interns as possible, the theatre education department was also involved in the actual rehearsal work. At least one member of the education department would communicate with potential actors and occasionally develop the audition workshops. What’s more, the staff of this department were especially important during rehearsals as important contact people for the large number of players, as well as resourceful supporters of the directors when it came to theatre training—and they frequently functioned as coaches for individual players or mediated between parties.

After the premiere, we saw how much more present Schauspielhaus Graz had become in the city thanks to the citizens stage. Not only were the amateur actors proud to bring friends and family members to the performances who otherwise might not have been interested in the theatre. They have also remained connected to the theatre emotionally. They come back: whether onstage, backstage or as audience members. The fact of being onstage at the city theatre as the unique part of an arduous but intense theatre process, of speaking competently and publicly about something relevant and important and, not least, of meeting people you might otherwise never have met—all that contributed to what became a memorable event in the lives of many of the participants. We also want this breath of fresh air, these encounters, again, which is why we have developed two projects for the 2019/20 season: in the first, we will bring the phenomenon of (football) fans to the stage and in the second, we will explore (different) tastes of home. □

Così vicino. Così lontano



BY
VINCENZO PICONE

About one year ago Paola Donati, the artistic director of Fondazione Teatro Due in Parma (Italy), and I started to think about the value and meaning of the practice we call participatory theatre, which has become common all over Europe in the last 15 years.

Beyond the many definitions that try to frame this genre in a historical-theatrical vision (social theatre, social theatre of art, theatre of frailties...), what immediately struck us is its dual nature, which brings opportunities and risks. Also, in my experiences with participatory theatre and my work as a theatre educator with non-professionals, I have often had the chance to verify, on the one hand, theatre's tendency towards social politics regarding the weaker parts of society (such as refugees or disabled people), and, on the other, an opposing tendency towards exploiting the non-professional actor as the new paradigm of contemporary theatre.

The border which we are navigating – the one that separates professional and non-professional actors, theatre and *polis*, artistic research and political necessity – questions not only the function of theatre in today's world, but calls above all for an evaluation of the competences and needs that inhabit our times, our cities and our theatres.

This is the basis on which *Così vicino. Così lontano* was born. It was the first step of a multi-phase project that aims to connect different parts and different ages of the city. Everything started in a void, an absence. By observing a lack of bridges—or relationships—between those who are starting out on their life path and those who keep the secrets and memories of it. The elderly and children. Opposite and complementary poles of a never-ending circle.

The engine driving forward the research on these two

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realities has been a group of 40 university students who started a lab where they could meet with seven children once every two weeks, have them play theatre and ask them questions about their lives.

As a first step, we went in small groups of students and kids to day centres for the

elderly, nursing homes, ballrooms and different organisations in the city. As a second step, we asked the elderly men and women of the city to come to the theatre with us. We could call it a narrative barter: a way of having people experience different places in the city.

This first research phase was central to connecting the actors involved in the project—kids, students and the elderly—and to creating a new map of the city, a map made of subtle relationships, like in *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino. In this way, the theatre became an active catalyst in people's lives, mixing gazes and points of view, ideas, stories and utopias. But how were we going to transform the many meetings, the stories we gathered, the perspectives, the entire process, into a theatrical form?

For this first study, we started with *The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other*, a play by Peter Handke in which the actors have no lines, only stage directions. A script of more

than fifty pages describes the (extra)ordinary life of a square in a random city in the world. People passing by, laughing, running; men, women, children; greetings, half-stories, faces; imaginary loves, extra-slow movements, prayers; life that runs and flows. This daily flow, which often gives way to dreams and surreal realities, contains the possibility of the encounter: among children (with their way of inhabiting space, both onstage and in real life), the elderly (with their way of observing and telling) and the students (with their thirst for knowledge and their confusion).

An encounter halfway between reality and fiction, between the city and the theatre (as if it were possible to draw real borders between the two).

Many stories, no story?

Maybe.

The sole presence of these bodies that are so different one from another seems to show what spoken word hides letting you discover that everything you are looking for is already there, so near and so far at the same time.

The project, which will continue with a much more complex second step in order to deepen what we just unveiled, made plain a truth that is both ancient and contemporary, necessary in every study today: the need to transform spaces into communal places. Peter Brook's 'empty space' of theatre can be the only one to remind us of this.

Reminiscing the feeling of the first step of *Così vicino. Così lontano*, I have to think of the ancient Chinese clocks, or *hsiang yin*, which indicated the passing of time with incense burning and consuming itself. And I think that every time I look for the feeling of things and I try to hold it, it has already gone, and what is left is the contrail of presence that smells of eternity. □

Dams and Inhibitions



BY

**BALÁZS CZUKOR, NÓRA SURÁNYI AND
JÚLIA SALAMON**

Balázs's Experience

It was fundamental for us to create a performance that was based on personal stories; that the play be created with and by the people participating in it. Since the performance was commissioned by Weöres Sándor Theatre, as a director, I kept in mind what would be compatible with the theatre's regular crowd.

I thought it was important for participants to take part in the performance not as actors but as representatives of their stories: that way they wouldn't feel the need to play a role. I strived to create an intimate and trusting environment where participants would have no problem standing in front of an audience. We also tried to make the performance easy to perform anywhere, not just in a theatre setting. The budget for the performance was minimal. The scenery, props and some of the costumes were used from the theatre's stock.

In the initial phase of the project, we conducted an interview with each participant. During rehearsals, we decided that each individual would be the "protagonist" of their own story. As a theatre in a small town, we strived to stage the participants' stories without exposing them to gossip. During the creation process, we co-wrote the scenes with the participants, so everyone was involved in developing their own story—and sometimes the others' stories. Still, I had the final

**As a theatre
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say in most cases. We felt it was important to have a meeting with the audience after the performance. Usually half the attendees would stay and many would share their views on the performance topic or their own life experiences. I found that during rehearsals and performances, participants had the opportunity to look at their own story from multiple angles. In many cases, this led to positive perceptions of it, reducing their anxiety about their own stories.

Perhaps the biggest challenge during the rehearsal process was finding acceptance within the theatre itself. Presumably, it was difficult to accept that there were not only actors performing, and it was hard to bring the civilian participants and actors together. The participatory theatre format was called into question: Was it equal to a standard theatre programme? The theatre crew who came to see the show surprisingly missed the opportunity to participate in the post-performance talk, where they would have been able to share their point of view or challenge the idea. The organisational team was not able to adapt their way of working to draw in a new audience for this type of performance.

Nóra's Experience

On the subject of giving birth, I envisioned a performance that had never been realised before because the stories we received kept reshaping the message of the performance. This often caused me, as co-director, serious internal conflict. On many occasions I wrote or edited a text that was either completely foreign to me or contradictory to my views.

We tried to hold onto the initial idea that if one of the participants had a clear idea about their subject matter, we would amplify that person's idea and make it understandable and

consumable. I was able to respect the idea of a community theatre, to keep what the participant came up with, knowing that it might be detrimental to the quality of the piece.

At the very beginning, I interviewed all the participants and, after analysing the interviews, shared them with my creative peers and other participants. I find it very important to record live speech in such workflows, as there may be cases where one's own storytelling vocabulary makes it easier to write a scene later. For the same reason, I also made regular audio recordings during joint discussions, always with the participants' consent.

I wanted the people who applied for the open call to be included in the performance in whatever way they wished to be. That way, each of the stories told would appear onstage. Participants could decide to provide their story for someone else to perform, or to perform it themselves.

The concept was that participants would be joined by two actors to support them and to include professional acting in the performance. The fictional scenes, partly invented by me, that connected the individual stories were played by the actors.

During the months-long preparation period, the workflow was characterised by very good and intimate collaboration,

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I was able to respect the idea of a community theatre, to keep what the participant came up with, knowing that it might be detrimental to the quality of the piece.

meetings and conversations, and a cohesive community formed. The two actors who joined at the end of the rehearsal process needed to take part in the same casting process as the rest of the team. We noticed that one of the actors guided and answered our questions superficially, while the other actor, like the participants, gave open and honest answers. We did not jump to any conclusions at first; instead, we waited to see if he would demonstrate any sincerity or openness. Yet it not only became clear that it would not happen, but that, on the contrary, the latter actor's participation started to be counterproductive and subversive within the community. The other actor mixed well with the pre-formed group, so much so that we also could develop a scene based on his real-life experience. From this we learned the lesson that, next time, we should probably cast the actors and non-professional participants at the same time. Of course, the theatre was involved in deciding which actors were available for the project, which places an external constraint on the casting process.

Júlia's Experience

Let me start out by sharing my thoughts on *Dams and Inhibitions* from a structural standpoint, or what the performance meant as a collaboration between a theatre as an institutional form and civilian participants. I was happy to work in a production that enriched the programme of the theatre, which typically offers classical theatre formats. I saw it as an audience and community-building opportunity. I do not consider the participatory art project to be radical within its own genre and I think the degree of experimentation is well-adapted to the host environment. We were able to find this balance thanks to our own intuition, consensus and compromise with the participants involved.

Inviting guest artists is a common practice at the theatre, but in this case, both the assisting personal of the director and the majority of the players, the participants, came from outside the institution, which was also a new situation for the theatre staff.

We have here not only a guest performance but a project-based creation, with a newly written script. It is important to emphasise that the key to our performance was the creation of a safe space where there was freedom of expression and dissent, without discrimination. In my opinion, this raised questions for many of the permanent theatre staff who repeatedly, and in some cases maliciously, broke down during the workflow. The way I see it, there was a conflict between a highly hierarchical institutional operation (the theatre) and a more horizontally thinking production. Sometimes this gave us a curious, supportive institutional framework, and sometimes an indifferent or hostile attitude.

Another key concept in directing was for the participants to take responsibility for one another (related to the safe space concept). None of us had to provide the participants with a safe, predictable, professional work environment. In retrospect, I think that with more thorough preparation within the institution – such as an educational activity to inform

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the staff of the genre—we could have been better equipped for the spring pre-premiere rehearsal period. I attribute this shortcoming to the lack of experience that both we and the institution had in the participatory working method.

The conclusion for me is that if we want to promote a less familiar type of performance, we have to start with the logic and characteristics of the given “cultural product”. In my opinion, organic communication and audience organisation would have been a more successful strategy for such a performance. Here I think it is important to understand that the number of tickets sold per performance is not necessarily an indicator of its quality. What does indicate the success of an experimental performance like this one is whether we can reach our given target group. I saw untapped potential in it. Although we took steps to reach different professional target groups (in this case, midwives or gynaecologists in training, nurses in training or local doulas), I see an issue with sticking to the usual communication tasks and not being proactive and reactive in the context of the project. As a suggestion, I think a more organic collaboration between units in different areas of the theatre – instead of thinking about a project and doing routine tasks – could help in developing the right communication. On the other hand, I saw the guest performance in Schauspielhaus Graz as a very positive, outstanding initiative that also strengthened the participatory community, which was good for the theatre. □

Images:

Dams and Inhibitions [Gátak és Gátlások] by Balázs Czukor and Nóra Surányi
(Szombathely/Hungary). © Mészáros Zsolt.



TM Amsterdam



BY

MARTIEN LANGMAN & EVA KNIBBE

Amsterdam is a city of diversity and extremes. Half of the people registered in Amsterdam are foreigners, and they represent 180 different nationalities; the city's sixteenth-century buildings contrast with modern urban developments; and while homelessness is on the rise, there is also a rapidly expanding business district, the Zuidas, attracting multinational companies. Amsterdammers are always on the move in this city of possibilities, whether it's partying at the Melkweg, tending horses at the riding school on the Overtoom or singing gospel at the Surinami Wi Eegi Kerki Church.

How Much Do We Really Know About the People We Share This City With?

TM Amsterdam is the Toneelmakerij's new series of participatory projects involving young people. When we set out to define the basic concept for TM Amsterdam, the two of us cast our minds back to our own teenage years.

Eva grew up in Utrecht in rather niche subculture. As a teenager she went to Werkplaats, a school attended by mostly privileged left-wingers (and it is also the alma mater of Beatrix, the former queen of the Netherlands). At weekends, Eva would take drama courses and practise the accordion. She lived in a very pleasant, protected world and would rarely—if ever—find herself in conversation with football fans, bus drivers, clerics at St. Martin's Cathedral or the prostitutes working on Hardebollenstraat.

Martien grew up in Rotterdam. Her school was a stone's throw from the city's port, the largest port in Europe. She knew very little about the people who worked there or their stories. She wanted to know more but never found any opportunity or occasion to start a conversation. They were living in the same

city, but they could just as well have been living in different worlds.

Most young people move in rather small circles, in a world within a world. As a teenager, you are getting ready to fly the nest and leave the world that your parents have shaped around you. You are about to leave your secondary school, your extracurricular activities, your home. It is the perfect moment to start engaging with what is happening outside your little world.

The Passage of Time

Amsterdam is in a state of constant flux, but there is also a lot here that is timeless. This city is brimming with stories. And those stories reach further back in time than our own personal

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Amsterdam is in a state of constant flux, but there is also a lot here that is timeless. This city is brimming with stories.

history. It can be comforting to discover that your life is relative, and your struggles are universal. That very thought takes us out of our bubble, even if only for a moment, and helps us put our own concerns into perspective.

TM Amsterdam

The idea behind TM Amsterdam is simple. First, we choose a specific historical building in the city as the starting point for a play. Then the participants have to do research on it. We go through this process not only with young people, but also with adults who have a historical connection to the location

in question. The stories told by the both the young people and the adults will form the basis for a play in which they all participate.

Using this new approach, we are appealing to a new group of young people: we are going to work with individuals who stand out for the story they have to tell rather than their acting talent. Cooperation between the young people and the adults who have a connection to the building will be crucial in this process—and the common denominator will be our shared city. The young people will conduct their own research, collect stories and conduct interviews with people who are relevant to the story they want to tell. This will require curiosity, empathy and the courage to ask questions. We might sometimes think that all the information we could ever need is already available on the internet, but there is nothing like a face-to-face conversation with someone who can give a first-hand account. The play will then be performed at the historical location itself.

Take, for example, the homeless man at Lelylaan Station. What is his story? Is he a father like King Lear? And what about Amsterdam's famous red-light district? Did prostitutes also work there in the sixteenth century, and were most of them foreign, as they are nowadays? Do today's sex workers ever wonder how it might have been for their predecessors? Hearing stories from other people and understanding their similarities and differences can elicit compassion and foster understanding.

This kind of research is also valuable for the adults. It has a reciprocal effect: the young people are naturally curious about the people and places in the city and want to know what the adults with a personal connection to the location have to share with them and ask them about.

By working on these projects on location, we will attract a new audience, complementing regular theatre-goers with people who are interested in seeing the young people onstage, as well as people who have a connection to the location and curious passers-by.

Boys from Here (The First Play by TM Amsterdam)

The Toneelmakerij is housed in a former orphanage which was run by nuns and took in boys from 1600 to 1960. Today, through the windows of our office in the former boardroom, we can see children from the crèche across the road playing in the playground. Children must also have played on this charming, secluded square hundreds of years ago, and it must have been a sad scene for the orphans who had no parents to go home to when playtime was over. Time marches on, but the image of children at play is timeless: they still have their push-scooters, there is still the requisite bit of rough and tumble, and they still mess about with sticks.

Former residents of the orphanage visit the building once in a while. We accompany these now elderly men as they cross the little square where they used to play, where there used to be a carousel, where they would get sweets from the head sister if they had been good. If they wet their bed, though, they would be sent out in bare feet to the same square with the soiled sheets over their head and made to stand in full view of the other children. Memories such as these played out in the minds of former residents when they revisited the building. They remembered loneliness and humiliation, but also the sense of camaraderie: hiding communion wafers in the seams of their clothes, thinking fondly of the kind Sister Emilia, serving as altar boys and meeting the girls from the neighbouring orphanage.

Today many young people are still being removed from their parental homes and placed in the care of others. What would children in institutions in Amsterdam today think of this history? And what might be the outcome of a conversation between the now elderly orphans and today's foster children? What advice would they give each other? What benefits do the men feel they got from their time in the orphanage? What do today's young people think about their guardians? Do they get up to the same kind of mischief as previous generations?

For this production, research was conducted by the older generation of orphans working together with young people living in care institutions and foster families. We incorporated interviews between the participants in podcasts. We enriched the personal stories with information from the extensive archives, which revealed stories behind almost every room in the building. For example, what are offices today, were once dormitories and laundry rooms.

All these activities culminated in a play in which eight young people met four much older orphans. They had a lot more in common than anyone had thought. Together, they told the story of the boys who once lived in the orphanage and of the courage and resilience of the foster children coping with their situation.

The stories formed the basis for three podcasts which can be listened to in the former orphanage, allowing the stories to echo on down the years, long after the final words of the play were spoken. □

Press Feature



BY
VERITY HEALEY

Not all countries have the same ideas about how participatory theatre projects “should” work, and what the role of the artist, within these communities, is.

Collaborating with the Community

A debate has long reigned among those who create participatory theatre about whether the experience of the process for non-professional participants is more important than the aesthetics of the particular piece. At a festival event, Simon Sharkey, artistic director of the Necessary Space and associate director of National Theatre of Scotland (NTS), discussed several collaborative projects that focused on high aesthetic values as well as community involvement in the process. The Shetland Island’s Ignition, which examined residents’ complicated attitudes to the oil industry and renewable energy sources, held workshops, residencies, and pop-up events that inspired community conversations around the topics and helped shape the content of the production. The result was a theatrical experience in a Toyota Prius (the world’s first mainstream hybrid automobile), where audiences exposed to real stories about the community’s link to travel and transport, were challenged to think about their own relationship with cars.

But it can be difficult for artists to work with communities. A group of Danish artists were met with indifference when they held a community meeting in a village, they wished to make work with. But when the group retired to the pub and got talking with the locals, interest was organically initiated and the project went on to be successful. Birgit Eriksson, Professor at Aarhus University’s School of Communication and Culture in Denmark, who told the story, says it was a question of the artists needing to ask the community for help with the project, rather

than just turning up and dictating how the process should go.

The 'Who', the 'What', and the 'How'

Participatory theatre is also about who is in shows, which effects what they are about. *The Fan Man or How to Dress an Elephant*, by En Dymaei Theater Ensemble from Thessaloniki, Greece, is a work devised by disabled and able-bodied actors and non-actors. It is about institutional bullying of the disabled, how everyone in society is different, and how this difference should be accepted. It stands out precisely because the “who” affects the content of the show and the style of aesthetics. Actors were able to say their lines in a time which suited them. According to director Eleni Efthymiou, this choice is about giving everyone the space they need on stage and encouraging them to work together in an equal way because they all have the same aim—to act well. “*Participatory theatre is political in the way in which you choose to do it*”, said Efthymiou.

Some artists refute the term ‘participatory’ though. Mohamed El Khatib, director of *Stadium*, believes that the genre does not apply to his work. For democratic reasons, he prefers “*having people talk for themselves, especially the working classes*”. *Stadium*, a kind of documentary theatre, showcases the stories of football fans from Racing Club de Lens. Lens itself has been abandoned by successive French governments after the demise of France’s mining industry. By involving real-life fans in the show, El Khatib brings to life their stories in an unfiltered account of “*sociological and human truth*”. For El Khatib, it is “*a form of symbolic fixing for the people who have been broken by the system*”.

For Tue Biering, director of Fix and Foxy’s *A Doll’s House*, theatre is a “*perfect hostage situation where the audience is trapped in the courtesy of theatre*”. This production stretches

that idea—and Ibsen’s realism—by having non-actors who are partners in real life, take on the roles of Torvald and Nora in front of an audience, in their own home. Moving around their space watching their real-life partnership play out alongside the characters’ relationship, the play took on a modern societal context. It also allowed the non-actors to make personal reflections about themselves.

The Inclusion Debate

Hillbrowfication, a collaboration between the DorkyPark ensemble and the Hillbrow Theatre in Johannesburg, is a dance piece about Afrofuturism showcasing young performers from Hillbrow, a poverty-stricken district in South Africa’s biggest city (although the children taking part came from wide socioeconomic backgrounds). Whilst the show was well-received, it sparked fierce debate around inclusion and its purpose within participatory theatre. Tunde Adefoye, a speaker at the ETC International Theatre Conference and city dramaturg at KVS in Brussels, told the conference he was “*bothered by it*”. Adefoye went on to acknowledge the hard work put in by the young performers. But he also expressed a worry that the production was a bit of Africa made for a white audience “*without needing to challenge the racist and colonial reality that is present in their own city*”. For him, the money could have been better spent working with artists of African descent living in Germany, who could “*give their visions of an Afrofuture that is less a variety show and textbook example of exotification*”. Constanza Macras of DorkyPark and the director of the piece insists that *Hillbrowfication* talks about xenophobia and borders within the city, mentioning that the show was based on an Afrofuturistic novel by Andrea Hairston and materials

developed with the cast. Miriam Tscholl (the pioneer of Bürgerbühne or participatory theatre in Europe and curator for this festival), said it was created mainly for black communities in Johannesburg. Tscholl does acknowledge, though, that Adefoye's comments necessitate further discussion.

Process vs. Aesthetics

Festivals such as Our Stage and participatory theatre highlight the debates being had around the process—a show's developmental journey—and its aesthetics. Some shows might focus more on the aesthetics, which can make people worry that the emphasis has been less on the process—to the detriment of the participants. Or it could be the other way around: the process has been invested in more—at the expense of the aesthetics—making it seem less professional. The conflict between process and aesthetic was nicely illustrated by *Long Live Regina!*, at times a verbatim documentary theatre piece about women and childcare/childbirth issues, performed by Roma women from Hungary. It's aesthetic—putting ordinary people on stage to tell their stories, and its structure—women celebrating a birthday party and telling their personal stories about childbirth experiences—perfectly echoes the psychodrama therapy workshops the show was born out of; a sort of process meets aesthetics.

So, what is the future of this kind of work? I put to Tscholl that the theatre world might be witnessing a minor revolution—where theatre is becoming more collaborative, opening out to more voices and communities—but she says that participatory theatre only makes up 10/20 per cent of theatre in Europe. She mentions that whilst participatory theatre is growing in countries such as Italy, Greece, France, and Scotland, where it is institutionally

embraced, in Poland and Hungary artists have taken participatory theatre into the independent sector due to a lack of state support. However, even there, participatory theatre is on the rise because it is seen as a medium for political involvement.

Sharkey believes that global institutions are panicking as they have realised that the Western canon is less relevant to people and they don't know how to find new stories. He says the place of the playwright is changing and that a playwright's role in the broader theatre world—not just in participatory theatre—is shifting from being the sole author to someone who arranges material that is devised or found by others; a sort of dramaturgical role.

Theatre was always about collaboration, Eriksson adds, it's just that it's been hidden from us until recently. Now people are becoming more aware of it. As for Adefoye, he believes that theatre is a “*democratising tool for different individuals to tell the stories they want without fear of being rated or critiqued by the values of a dominant group of people*”. For him, the Our Stage festival has a long way to go to get there.

Participatory theatre is indeed changing the theatrical landscape. For some, like Tscholl, it celebrates plurality and employs a high standard of aesthetics. For others, the question of what the collaboration between artists and citizens looks like is an important part of its relevancy. Rather than clarifying terms and work methods, the Our Stage festival showed that there are as many different approaches to participatory theatre as there are disparate voices taking part and being given a platform. □

A long form version of this piece, Participatory Theatre – Europe's Game Changer by Verity Healey, was originally published on HowlRound Theatre Commons, 4 August 2019. www.howlround.com

Local Productions on the Global Stage

The opportunities are evident, but the experience of European co-productions in the field of participatory theatre is rather modest. In addition to financial and organisational barriers, challenges exist in terms of content. If the author's text no longer serves as the basis for the action on stage, and rather, citizens represent themselves on stage, to what extent can a local concept be transferred to another city or another country? Performing arts professionals Kristof Blom, Simon Sharkey and Miriam Tscholl promote pan-European views on participatory theatre, its potential and its future developments.



*Top: Kristof Blom at the ETC International Theatre Conference. © Sebastian Hoppe.
Middle left: Addressless by Lifeboat Unit – STEREO AKT (Hungary) at Our Stage - 4th European Bürgerbühne Festival. © Máté Barthaneu.
Middle right: Every Body Electric by Doris Uhlich (Austria/Germany) at Our Stage - 4th European Bürgerbühne Festival. © Theresa Rauter.
Bottom: Long Live Regina! by Self-Theatre (Hungary). © Gabriella Csozó.*

Our Stage – 4th European Bürgerbühne Festival



BY
MIRIAM TSCHOLL

Research for Our Stage – 4th European Bürgerbühne Festival

In the summer of 2018, when the idea for this festival was born, I had a lot of questions: Where in Europe do artists work with participatory formats? What conditions do they emerge under and what significance do they have in each of the countries? What sorts of participatory theatre formats have emerged and why? The previous three Bürgerbühne festivals—in Dresden, Mannheim and Freiburg—always had exciting European and international aspects but focused on the German theatre landscape. This time, we wanted the festival to be consistently European: in the selection of productions, speakers and university partners, and in terms of language and content.

The search for suitable theatre productions and content for the festival was not a systematic process pursuing clearly defined goals. My vision was to understand something about the way European theatre is developing in this field; to discover new working methods, partners, role models and structures; to bring interested parties into contact with one another; and, last but not least, to strengthen the European idea itself.

The Research Process

After the German Federal Cultural Foundation approved the funding application, I drew up a list of theatre professionals I wanted to contact during the first few months to ask for tips. So my work, apart from researching online, was to email, call and Skype people in as many European countries as possible to ask them if they knew someone who might know someone. While some contacts turned out to be a dead end, others opened up entire worlds. Sometimes I would find myself Skyping with strangers without knowing who connected me with them. The

nice thing was that almost everyone shared their knowledge and expertise generously with me, giving me names, theatres, plays, festivals and dates. Theatre directors, divisional directors, festival organisers, dramaturgs, lecturers, doctoral students as well as the artists themselves not only recommended me their own work, but also named other artists and theatres from their countries. I concluded from this that there is a unifying social motivation and a general interest in the subject that is greater than any one individual artistic creation.

Parallel to this unsystematic but effective interrogation strategy, we launched a bilingual open call, in German and English. My intern and I received half of the 600 video submissions in response to the open call and the other half as a result of arduous and detailed individual enquiries. Of the 600 or so submissions, about 300 met the application criteria: namely, a production where non-professional actors had the leading roles in contemporary and professionally produced theatrical works. The open call also attracted many applicants who had sent their work, which rather resembled amateur theatre, out to various festivals. There were other applicants who assured us that they were not professionals but, at second glance, this meant that they were “not professionals yet” or “unfortunately not professionals”. These productions were also discarded because they had neither asked nor answered the key question of the festival regarding the specific aesthetic treatment of the non-professional at the level of content and presentation.

The Selection Criteria

A European artistic advisory board, consisting of experts I got to know during my interrogation period, was finally sent a shortlist of about thirty productions, including video recordings,

which we discussed at a full-day meeting where almost all of us had just met. This debate was extremely constructive and enlightening and had a big influence on the final decision.

I also wanted my final selection to subvert common expectations. Citizen stage formats are often filled with expectations and clichés that are roughly: “Real people stand on stage in medium-sized groups and tell authentic experiences, often marked by exclusion, in their own words from the middle of the stage”. Without wanting to deny that this form of performance is justified, it is true that the contemporary performing arts currently practiced with non-professional performers can be reduced to it.

Another important criterion of my selection was diversity in every respect: in terms of the variety of forms, themes, age of performers, social affiliation, skin colour, group size, venues and audience role. Every piece I considered was therefore compared to the other works in my selection considerations. Where were the overlaps in aesthetics and content? What role did the audience play? Were there also young people in the production? Which production contained choreographic elements? What social milieu was not yet represented?

I hesitatingly developed some selection criteria during the search, such as when the work premiered. I concluded that, if the subject was important, it was alright for a production to be older. For example, Roger Bernat and I reworked and thus salvaged *Pending Vote*. Written in 2011, the piece had not been shown in recent years, but the participatory format—the

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**Citizen stage
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audience became a digitally voting parliament—and the topic—which scrutinised democracy, its possibilities and its limits—seemed more relevant to me than ever.

The productions ultimately chosen negotiate many of today's most important and difficult social topics: challenges faced by ethnic minorities; poverty and housing shortages in metropolises; disenchantment with democracy; growing nationalism, especially in the working class; the role of gender; and, in the supporting programme, the dependence of rural regions and the role of women in Islam. To me, this clearly demonstrated the relevance of plays developed with non-professional actors; and how, arguably, this format may even have an edge over role-playing with professional actors, especially when the latter act in updated classical texts, which tend to lag behind current social discourse.

Differences Between European Countries

Another important part of my curatorial work focused on exploring the development of participatory theatre formats in different countries.

Through the numerous Skype calls and, above all, the face-to-face conversations, I gradually got an impression of the individual countries. The result was the supporting programme OUR WAY, which was made up of lectures on Belgium, Scotland, Poland, Italy, France, Switzerland, Austria. You can read these country reports in a publication about the festival. The reports show how diverse the motivations, approaches and conditions are under which professional theatre with non-professional actors is created. Aside from Hungary, which I wanted to consider and promote separately due to the difficult political situation, I chose only one production from each

country. It was hardest to choose in Belgium because there was so much interesting work there.

I have observed some country-specific differences in the development of participatory theatre formats and a rough distinction must be made between artistic and political motivations. While political funding instruments were not adapted in Germany in the past ten years—during which time citizens' stages and similar models received a boost and the theatres or individual artists got to decide how they spent their money and made artistic decisions—in some countries like Belgium, France or England, artistic interests developed alongside new laws or funding instruments, so it is difficult to judge what interests were there at the beginning.

In other countries, such as Poland or Hungary, the interests of artists who want to use participatory formats tend to be contrary to political interests. Since the national conservative party won the elections in Poland, the upward trend of experimental theatre—which includes participatory formats and comes almost exclusively from the independent scene—began declining. Mainly concentrated in Warsaw, it has largely disappeared from the rest of Poland. Nevertheless, Polish theatre-makers told me about subversive counter-movements in which renowned directors earn their money at the big state theatres but, in return, for idealistic reasons, get involved in free participatory projects, even though they receive very low salaries there.

I also did research in Scotland, Denmark, Italy, Sweden, Greece, Lithuania, Austria, Spain, Portugal, the Czech Republic and Switzerland. In all these countries I received the same clear answer to my question as to whether this theatre format is experiencing an upward or downward trend: "There is a lot going on and there is more and more of it to come!". □

The Necessary Space – A Theatre of Opportunity



BY
SIMON SHARKEY

I was part of the original team that created the National Theatre of Scotland, launching in 2006. After fourteen years with the company, I left and created The Necessary Space as a way of continuing the participatory work I had developed with the National Theatre.

The name *The Necessary Space - A Theatre of Opportunity* is a play on Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed'. I think if you start with oppression, then you're defining oppression and you're exercising oppression. So instead, I look for the opportunity in participation.

But I also call it "A Theatre of Opportunity" because of the quote from Martin Luther King, where in the midst of civil unrest and revolution in America he says "*We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We're confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare naked and dejected with a lost opportunity [...] Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilisations are written the pathetic words "too late" [...] Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to a long and bitter but beautiful struggle for a new world*".

The reason I call it The Necessary Space is because I think that we are in the same position where we are developing. We are in the midst of a paradigm shift in our world and we have the opportunity to change it. Politics isn't working. We're eleven years from ecological disaster. There are seven and a half billion people in the world. Five and a half billion of them have telephones. Religion doesn't work because we have more faith in our algorithms. The media doesn't work because we have fake news and we don't know where to find the truth. So where do we go? Do we go to the churches, the parliaments,

to the online or to media? Theatre is the most important place to be as it's an opportunity for us to be able to do something about that. That's why I call it a theatre of opportunity

The National Theatre Scotland was an organisation that seized an opportunity in the history of Scotland to remodel and reshape everything. We called it Theatre Without Walls. One of our first participants was a sheep. You may laugh but it came with its farmer to feature in a photo shoot for a poster. As a result the farmer had the opportunity to help launch a national company in his remote rural community. We also made theatre in high rise flats, in abandoned hotels, in the bowels of ships, in old factories, shop fronts, fields, cathedrals, football stadiums, in tube stations, in telephone boxes and of course we made theatre in theatres. We mustn't forget that.

The principle was that professional theatre and participatory theatre would be exactly the same thing. There was no distinction between them. They would get the same production values and attention. We took over whole islands and drove audiences around in cars to see theatre. We took over cities and put people's portraits into windows, into cities, into galleries and made epic productions. We painted portraits in sand, we painted rainbows—that was really hard. But we managed it and people came to see it.

What I really want to talk about is our home away theatre, Beyond Borders, where we worked with what we call 'the theatre makers of now'. We reached out to the Bangladesh community in Glasgow, to represent Glasgow. We went to Jamaica and worked with young men in the ghettos whose narratives of going into drugs and violence had already been written for them. But we introduced participatory theatre and they wrote a new narrative for their community. We worked

with the indigenous population in Australia who were talking about being one generation away from losing the dreamtime stories. We produced the works at home and then brought it to Scotland, brought it away, so that there was a dialogue between all of these countries. Between artists from the favelas in Brazil and street kids from India and settled refugees in Chicago.

Moderator: *How did these communities react to your European ideas of theatre?*

Simon: I think it's important that we don't go to other countries with an assumption that European theatre is the form. We should be exploring and learning what forms, contexts and forums there are. That's what makes it exciting—that we are not the experts of these narratives or these forms. So when I went to Jamaica it was my job to listen and to learn about reggae, dubstep and colonialism and to be able to use that as the foundation for the theatre that we were making.

Moderator: *Is what you do political activism?*

Simon: It depends what you mean by political activism. When you send a team of artists into a community to listen, respond, shape and find form for a voice that has not been heard before,

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When you send a team of artists into a community to listen, respond, shape and find form for a voice that has not been heard before, is that politically active? I would say yes.

is that politically active? I would say yes. It's another form of politics because the old forms don't work. They are broken. There is a lack of trust there. If you are creating something with young people or cross-generational and you're finding new narratives that are not concerning themselves with the binary politics that we are all frustrated with, then you are being political with that community in a new form of dialogue and politics. That's why I think that's activism. Creating a school is political activism. Finding these forums, forms and context is an act of being political.

Moderator: *But do you see a danger in losing your artistic goals and artistic value through that?*

Simon: No, I see that as a massive opportunity for artists to engage in a dialogue that is not necessarily about party politics or binary politics. It's such an exciting paradigm to work in. □

This text is an extract from a presentation and panel talk on "European Formats of Participatory Theatre", during the ETC International Theatre Conference, Dresden in May 2019.



Image top:

Left to right: Marie-José Malis, Iris Laufenberg, Simon Sharkey and Kristof Blom at the ETC International Theatre Conference. © Sebastian Hoppe.

Image bottom:

Ich bin Muslima – Haben Sie Fragen?
by Martina van Boxen (Dresden/Germany) © Sebastian Hoppe.

CAMPO



BY
KRISTOF BLOM

In Belgium, culture is a regional affair: there is no national ministry of culture. That's why, for example, the scene here is very different from the one in Walloons. So all the projects I will discuss here have been supported by the regional government of Flanders.

The early 1980s were a turning point in Flanders because it is when it began funding culture. This led to the creation of all of the big (now famous) arts centres such as Kaaiteater and STUK Leuven. It was also the start of the Flemish Wave in the performing arts, with different companies such as Rosas and Needcompany making their debuts. I take the 1980s as a starting point because, before this, there was nothing going on in Flanders. In part that is because we never had a Shakespeare or a Brecht – it is not part of our history.

At the same time, the work from the 1980s was not really dealing with political issues. It was art for art's sake, and it did not really resonate. The first reaction to this came in the mid-1990s with a new artistic wave led by Alain Platel. He had a big influence on working with non-professionals – maybe it was because he did not have an artistic background. At this point, I was interning at Victoria, a production house of Platel's early works. He began working in a 'devised theatre' way early on, putting non-professional dancers and actors onstage with professionals, which helped open up the traditional "high art" that had been produced up until then. And it inspired a lot of companies and theatre-makers to do the same. It resulted in companies like Hush Hush Hush and Latrinité, the start of "Theatre Stop" in Belgium, and to Victoria commissioning Jérôme Bel to work with non-professionals.

Fast-forward to the year 2000, a fantastic year to work and live in Flanders. We had a very progressive, socialist-liberal

government that put social topics and ethical issues high on the agenda. In the performing arts, it was also the first time that there were possibilities of working with non-profession-

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Participation is not the fifth piece of the pie but rather a part of each of the other four pieces.

als in a professional way. At that time, it had the label “social artistic work”. The Flemish Minister of Culture, Bert Anciaux, was a key player and, in 2008, there was a new decree for participation voted in by parliament. It not

only had an impact on youth and sport, but also on culture. Throughout these first years of the twenty-first century, working with non-professionals in a participatory way gained more and more importance.

Eight years later, another decree was passed which turned the whole funding system on its head. Previously, in order to be able to apply for funding, you had to be a festival, a theatre or dance company. Now it did not matter who you were: all you had to do was to define your function. The Ministry of Culture defined five functions: production, presentation, reflection, research & development and participation. Finally, participation was placed on the same level as all other professional arts. It was not just a tiny subcategory anymore. The decree also made it possible to choose more than one function, which led to a lot of new initiatives by companies and performing arts centres that had not dealt with participation before. It is also important to mention that once you have a certain amount of funding, you must tick off all five of those functions. Huge institutions

like the opera and the ballet, which previously had nothing to do with participation, are now obliged by law to work in that field as well. Clearly, then, it is very important in Belgium today. It is completely integrated into everyday practices and has even made it into the school curriculum.

CAMPO

CAMPO started in 2008 when Victoria merged with Nieuwpoorttheatre. We now have three venues in Ghent: CAMPO Victoria, which is more focused on producing as it has four studios and one big rehearsal space; CAMPO Nieuwpoort, which is where we do most of the presentations of the work; and CAMPO Boma, which is focused on participatory work, operating on an R&D level. At Boma, there is a collective of 60 artists made up of fashion designers, furniture-makers, writers, poets, philosophers and DIY artists. The idea behind it is to welcome an audience with a fairly low threshold by offering accessible formats such as workshops or markets. CAMPO wants to get people interested enough so that, with time, they start buying theatre tickets.

The CAMPO Model: Four Pieces Of A Pie

I consider CAMPO to be a sort of pie with four pieces. The first piece is research and development, which is focused on long-term investment, not the immediate outcome. The second is production: other art centres often act as co-producers, while CAMPO takes on the role as an executive producer. The third piece is presentation. We run our programme at those three venues basically the whole year round. The fourth piece is post-production. I call it post-production because I want the works we produce to be seen; the artists we put in development

to get out. It is about introducing an international network surrounding CAMPO to the artists that we work with so they can build their own network. You can feel the connectedness of those four pieces because if research yields something interesting, we can produce it, present it and take it on tour.

Participation at CAMPO

Participation is not the fifth piece of the pie but rather a part of each of the other four pieces. At the same time, I want to note that, although participation is part of the total work we do, it is not the only work we do. Here are some examples of productions that clearly illustrate how we deal with participation, which can happen in many ways. The first is *Five Easy Pieces*, which is part of a series of works that we do with children for an adult audience. The series ended up going on tour all over the world. The series included *Five Easy Pieces*, plus we had Gob Squad doing *Before Your Very Eyes* at CAMPO and Philippe Quesne doing *Next Day*, and Etchells' *That Night Follows Day*, etc. Now they are all considered top international works, which is fantastic, but you cannot forget that they started off as local community projects with children from the three schools in our neighbourhood.

Another example is *Wild Life*, which is about teenagers and their relationship to music: what influence it has on their life and how it helps them deal with everyday life. We did it for the first time in London and then moved to different cities. Every city we go to, we workshop and bring in local teams. The further we take the project, the richer it becomes because we get influences from all over Europe. So it is not only about being a teenager in your own world, but about the differences between growing up in London or Munich, for example.

I also want to mention *Lecture For Every One* by Sarah Vanhee, which is a completely different sort of participatory concept. *Lecture For Every One* is a 15-minute lecture that pops up, unannounced, in unusual everyday situations like a football training session, a company board meeting, in church, wherever. It is a 15-minute monologue talking about society, of which, she explains, we are all co-creators and towards which we each have an individual responsibility. The lecture occurs at a time and place that nobody is expecting it. It can function as a voice or a gift because Sarah leaves after 15 minutes, which of course leads to a lot of discussion. An eyewitness creates a written report on each meeting. The idea of participation in this work is about finding new audiences. Because when I do a show that tours all over the world, it does not matter where I am: I end up performing for the same type of audience. Sarah's aim is to proactively change that homogeneity and decide herself what audience she wants to perform for.

One special mention is a project we call Neighbourhood Kitchen. Many people live around the Nieuwpoort venue and you cannot expect everyone nearby to be interested in seeing a theatrical work. Still, we want them to be proud that there is a theatre there, so once a month we cook together. It starts with workshops and everybody is invited. It is not the main focus of the venue, but the result is that people are proud to have CAMPO on their street. □

This presentation was given during the ETC International Theatre Conference, Dresden in May 2019.



Top left: *Schöne neue Welt: Familie 2.0* by Uta Plate (Graz/Austria) © Lupi Spuma.

Bottom: *Die Verwandlung* by Philipp Lux (Dresden/Germany) © Sebastian Hoppe.

Top right: *Jongens van hier* by Eva Knibbe. (Amsterdam/Netherlands) © Sanne Peper.

AUTHORS

Tunde Adefoye – *City Dramaturg, KVS, Brussels/Belgium*. Tunde Adefoye co-founded the youth platform Urban Woorden in Leuven (Belgium). In 2016, he began as city dramaturg at KVS, Brussels' Flemish city theatre. Additionally, he has done dramaturgy for plays and projects including *Malcolm X* and *(Not) My Paradise*. Since 2017, he has been delivering lectures and speeches, including a keynote at the 2019 ETC International Theatre Conference in Germany and at Wales Arts International's conference.

Raquel André – *Artist, Teatro Nacional D. Maria II, Lisbon/Portugal*. From early on in her artistic career, Raquel André has had an interest in collecting – especially in the idea of how to collect in the performing arts, about which she wrote a master thesis at University Federal of Rio de Janeiro (2016). In 2014 she started the ongoing project *Collection of People*, a work with four collections: *Lovers, Collectors, Artists and Spectators*.

Anestis Azas – *Director & Artistic Director of the Experimental Stage, Greek National Theatre, Athens/Greece*. Anestis Azas lives and works as a theatre director between Athens and Berlin. Since 2011, his work has focused on documentary theatre projects with participation of actors and non-professional actors on stage. Since October 2015, together with Prodromos Tsinikoris, he is the artistic director of the *Experimental Stage of the National Theatre in Athens*.

Kristof Blom – *Artistic Director CAMPO, Gent/Belgium*. Kristof Blom worked until 2001 as a dramaturg for companies such as Toneelhuis Antwerpen, Victoria, Hetpaleis. In 2008 he joined the start of CAMPO, an arts centre in Gent that combines a presentation, research

and production platform. In 2011 he became the Artistic Director of CAMPO.

Balázs Czukor – *Actor and Director, Szombathely/Hungary*. Balázs Czukor studied at the University of Theatre and Film Arts, Budapest. Early on in his career, he worked with different independent theatre groups such as Szputnyik Hajózási Társaság, and other sites of performance art. He has been a member of Bárka and Örkény Theater (Budapest) and Weöres Sándor Színház (Szombathely). Since 2010, he has been working as a director.

Birgit Eriksson – *Professor in Communication and Culture, Aarhus University, Aarhus/Denmark*. Birgit Eriksson's current research focuses on participatory arts and culture; cultural taste and communities; the uses of the arts; aesthetics, citizenship and politics. Eriksson is director of *Take Part – Research Network on Cultural Participation* and co-director of a research programme in *Cultural Transformations*. <http://pure.au.dk/portal/en/aekbe@hum.au.dk>

Verity Healey – *Arts Journalist & Filmmaker, London/United Kingdom*. Verity Healey is a London-based writer and filmmaker who writes for *HowlRound*, *Ministry of Counterculture*, *The London Economic* and *Exeunt*. Verity is also a published short story writer (anthology).

Eva Knibbe – *Stage director, Amsterdam/Netherlands*. Eva Knibbe creates performances that often are not fiction but organized events that cannot be fully directed. Previously, she filed a lawsuit against death and did a listing of all the things in the world. She worked for three years in the education department of *De Toneelmakerij*, where she co-designed the frames for *Tm-Amsterdam* and directed *Jongens van Hier*.

Martien Langman – *Head of Educational Department, De Toneelmakerij, Amsterdam/Netherlands.* Martien Langman studied Dramaturgy and works as a theatre pedagogue for various theatre companies and as a freelance journalist. A key ingredient for her educational projects is community art. Langman gives students the tools to grow into imaginative and independent thinkers and to find their preferred 'language' of self-expression.

Vincenzo Picone – *Stage Director, Parma/Italy.* Picone specialised in Theatre Disciplines in Palermo and Bologna. Part of his theatrical activity focuses on theatrical training projects, aimed at the new generations, collaborating with the company of Teatro dell'Argine, Fondazione Teatro Due in Parma and Fondazione Emilia Romagna Teatro.

Edit Romankovics – *Freelancer Actor, Teacher and Director, Self-Theatre, Budapest/Hungary.* Edit Romankovics has a specialisation in theatre and education. Over the past 25 years, she has taken part in TIE (theatre in education) performances, community and participatory theatre projects in Hungary. In these projects, she has worked as an actor, a teacher, a writer or a director. She also delivers workshops and courses on this topic.

Júlia Salamon – *Curator, Szombathely/Hungary.* Júlia Salamon is a curator who studied at the Art Theory and Management Department of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest. She has organised exhibitions and other contemporary art projects. She publishes essays in art themes and works as a lecturer at the Visual Art Department (ELTE, Szombathely).

Simon Sharkey – *Co-Founder of the National Theatre of Scotland (NTS).* Simon Sharkey is best known as one of the original team that built The National Theatre of Scotland and shaped their *Theatre Without Walls*. In 2019 he launched *The Necessary Space* through which his *Theatre of Opportunity* and *Theatre Without Walls* practice will continue to grow globally and locally. www.thenecessaryspace.com / Instagram: [@theatre_of_opportunity](https://www.instagram.com/theatre_of_opportunity)

Timo Staaks – *Theatre Pedagogue, Graz/Austria.* Timo Staaks studied Performing Arts and German and worked as a freelance drama teacher and assistant director in state theatres and in independent projects. In 2016/ 2017 he continued his education in the field of gaming theatre at the Federal Academy for Cultural Education, before he became a theatre pedagogue at Schauspielhaus Aktiv by Schauspielhaus Graz.

Nóra Surányi – *Media Artist, Szombathely/Hungary.* Nóra Surányi is a media artist and has exhibited many group and solo shows. She studied at the Intermedia Department and DLA programme of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest. She works as a co-creator next to Balázs Czukor, with whom she has a child, Róza Czukor.

Miriam Tscholl – *Director, Head of Bürgerbühne Dresden, Curator of Our Stage – 4th European Bürgerbühne Festival, Dresden/Germany.* Miriam Tscholl works as a director and curator. From 2009 to 2019 she was the director of the Bürgerbühne at the Staatsschauspiel Dresden and initiated the first Bürgerbühne Festival 2014, as well as formats such as Bürgerdinner and Montagscafé.

ABOUT ETC

Founded in 1988, the European Theatre Convention gathers more than forty European theatre members from twenty-three countries, reflecting the diversity of Europe's vibrant cultural sector. ETC fosters a socially engaged, inclusive notion of theatre that brings Europe's social, linguistic and cultural heritage to audiences and communities everywhere. As the largest network of public theatres in Europe, ETC promotes European theatre as a vital social platform for dialogue, democracy and interaction that responds to, reflects and engages with today's diverse audiences and changing societies.

Participatory theatre is a core pillar of ETC's current four-year ENGAGE programme, together with digital and youth theatre. A key aim of ENGAGE is to promote theatre formats which support larger and more diverse audiences to discover and enjoy theatre. This comprehensive, ground-breaking programme is supported by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

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Bürgerbühne, Community Theatre, Teatro do Oprimido, Social Drama... The practice and idea of turning citizens, users and audiences into active participants is on the rise in numerous fields of society and many theatres feel the urge to link art to new and more democratic forms of communication and community involvement.

Participatory Theatre – A Casebook is a publication by the European Theatre Convention, Europe's network of public theatres. It presents findings and reflections for the creative community based on the two-year project Our Stage, an artistic initiative between the European Theatre Convention, Staatsschauspiel Dresden & its Our Stage – 4th European Bürgerbühne Festival, and major European public theatres.