

GOOD **PRACTICES** **FACTORY**

February 2023 - February 2024

a **COMMON STORIES** project

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La petite troupe, MC93 © Najwa Kakiri

INTRODUCTION

by Virginie Dupray

The European project was built in the wake of the Second World War, in societies deeply traumatized by the extraordinary violence committed and suffered. The project of uniting the destinies of the continent's peoples across borders, languages, and conflicts required us to take on the task of remembering all our histories, and to aspire to a zone that could transcend violence.

Eighty years on, Europe is facing an unprecedented rise in extremism and identity-based divisions, fuelled by fantasized identities and multiple fears. Fear of otherness. Fear of others. Those others on the other side of the borders of a Europe that has set itself up as a fortress, now on the edges of a world it wanted to be the centre of for centuries but that is slipping through its fingers. The others on the inside. Called upon in the 50s and 60s to rebuild a devastated continent, they have since shaped and embodied the European project, economically, culturally, and symbolically.

To overcome the violence that runs through our European societies, we need to expose it. We need to dismantle this patriarchal and racist organization, the historical foundation of Europe's imperial deployment. We need to name and understand the ancient mechanisms that are still at work, as well as identify and question the norms and interests they serve. We then need to trust in our humanity (or our survival instinct?) to find new ways of working together to meet the immense economic, social, and ecological challenges that lie ahead.

In these European societies in upheaval, what is the place of cultural and artistic scenes as factories of the imaginary and narratives? And more particularly, since this is our field of action, what is the place of theatres and performing arts festivals? These are certainly marginal, and yet... As the very art of representation, shouldn't theatre and its supporting venues, on their own scale, commit themselves headfirst to these dynamics of deconstruction? Shouldn't those stories playing themselves out between our walls reflect the growing diversity of the territories we are trying to inhabit, testifying to their complexities and richness?

However, the performing arts world, like other cultural sectors, is not immune to colonial tensions and logics. Power, resources, decision-making, and programming positions are still predominantly in the hands of white men, while artists and cultural professionals from non-European migratory backgrounds are largely under-represented. The gap between what is presented on our stages and what is happening out there (in the reality of our societies) seems to be widening. As an immediate consequence, some of our audiences are dropping out of the cultural mainstream, rightly considering themselves excluded from the field of symbolic representation.

While the same diagnosis is widely shared in Europe, the different ways of accommodating this diversity varies widely, from pragmatism and positive action to republican postulates of equality, from the consideration of intersectional logics to the fear of communitarianism.

Lastly, while the growing demands of the authorities have prompted locally a great deal of reflection, experimentation, and action, the exchange and circulation of ideas, practices, and knowledge remain limited at a national level, and even more so at a transnational level, despite similar contexts. Each country concocts its own recipes with its own ingredients and with results that are not always convincing.

In the face of this threefold observation — an increasingly diverse, fractured and complex society, venues that struggle to present and represent this surrounding diversity, and isolated responses and policies at regional, national and European levels —, *Common Stories* seeks to create and inhabit a space of dissonance where other proposals, voices and pathways can be considered and celebrated. On its own scale, *Common Stories* lends an ear to these often invisibilized, neglected, and minoritized narratives and journeys. We lend an ear and open spaces for research, experimentation, and transmission for emerging artists as part of the *CommonLAB*, an annual traveling laboratory. But also, as

part of the *Good Practices Factory*, we open spaces for reflection and action on our own production, programming, and hosting practices.

Welcoming different paths and narratives should mean questioning the frameworks they will inhabit, the spaces for dialogue and exchange they will nurture with the teams, the audiences they will invite, and the equipment and skills they will need.

Because paradoxically, production and reception schemes, from the technical to the communicative, have never been so formatted. Facing these different narratives, we end up with the same technical requests, the same timeframes, the same support, the same communication media on-line forms to complete...

Institutions are struggling to break out of the daily routines that are said to guarantee proven professionalism.

But is it possible to rethink practices and dynamics so that these stories are fully heard by teams and audiences, so that these stories shift them, so that they may also resonate backstage, in offices, in front of screens, at ticket offices, in brochures, in corridors, and especially around coffee machines? Is this just a pipe dream?

Between Bobigny, Brussels, Lisbon, Cologne, Stockholm, and Warsaw, the *Good Practices Factory* relies on six autonomous groups. Organized around teams, they freely invite guests, activists, thinkers, mediators, artists, members of the public to reflect, in their own way, on a common question, chosen together at the start of each year.

During regular online meetings and an annual meeting at one of the partners' premises, experiences are shared, as are successes, dead ends, good (and sometimes not so good) practices, doubts, what works, and what doesn't...

Each year, a guide/manual/testimonial will be published around the annual theme of our exchanges, to share our questions, leads, and recommendations.

In February 2023, in dialogue with the Advisory Committee, the following annual theme was chosen: "Radicality: A Sustainable Transformation Towards Diversity?"

Can we think through radicality as intransigence, as an extreme,

as a refusal to compromise, or rather as probity and constancy, as root and source?

We have chosen to deeply anchor this theme in our practices, practices undergoing transformation, practices that are resolutely plural, given that fields of exploration and methodologies differ according to the partners and cities involved.

We soon realized that assessing radicality against the yardstick of our own approaches would take much longer than a year! It would take time to get to know each other, to understand each partner's context and challenges, and to build the bonds of trust necessary for any constructive exchange.

This first edition bears witness to that necessary time. It is neither a handbook of best practices, nor a toolbox, but an inventory of the actions and reflections of each partner, stimulated by this *Good Practices Factory* dynamic, which acted as a springboard to further explore our existing approaches.

Each partner has used it according to their own needs, in line with their own logic, and it is all very coherent in the end. This publication reviews a wide range of experiences in very different contexts: representativeness, access policies, internal dynamics, possible discriminations within teams...

This is an honest introduction to the questions that drive us, and to the experiences that carry us through our daily lives in Bobigny, Brussels, Lisbon, Stockholm, Cologne and Warsaw...

A space of dissonance? A sounding board? Or more simply, a tool for listening to the world...

Lisbon, June 2024



MC93 © Sylvain Lefeuve

THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN BOBIGNY

Daring to Call Out

A CULTURAL CENTRE IN DIALOGUE WITH ITS TERRITORY

The *Maison de la Culture* of Seine-Saint-Denis (MC93) is located in Bobigny, a working-class town in the Seine-Saint-Denis region in the northern suburbs of Paris. The city is home to many different communities, many of them are the results of more or less recent immigration, often tied to France's colonial history.

Questions of diversity and inclusion are therefore central to our project, which aims to be an open space where people who don't look alike may come together. On stage and around the stage, we try to represent changes in our society and to make a clear assessment of them.

This dialogue with the area is based on several action points:

→ Artistic programming that focuses on contemporary issues, giving priority to a repertory (which is still somewhat limited) that portrays the working classes and their concerns, as well as the stage presence of bodies and narratives that are often far too invisible.

→ The introduction of an "equal opportunity" class that prepares students for the French national drama school entrance examinations, accessible through audition and reserved for the most economically disadvantaged. This preparatory class has enabled many students with working class backgrounds and representing the diversity of our societies to be accepted into these national schools. Between 2019 and 2023, 19 students passed the competitive entrance exams.

→ A proactive recruitment policy to ensure that the team, like the artists and the public, is also more representative of our society, drawing from atypical backgrounds or people from visible minorities with equal skills. Teaming up as different people, taking on different points of view and sensitivities, both in our analysis of the world and in our perception of shows. We recognize that what can sometimes weaken us collectively proves to be a strength and can enhance our ability to understand the world around us and the regular upheavals it experiences.

TRAINING TOGETHER TO DARE TO CALL OUT

As in Brussels, we at Bobigny have chosen to start with our in-house teams to explore together issues surrounding diversity, and more specifically, racism.

The professional world reflects the society in which it develops. As such, issues related to racism cannot be ignored and need to be called out, especially when it tends to manifest itself through behaviours, comments, and biases that may seem harmless to the people who express them but are disparaging to the people concerned who experience them.

On June 30th, 2023, initial in-house discussions with a dozen employees from different departments led to two conclusions:
→ Tackling this sensitive issue remains tricky insofar as we do not all have the same experiences or the same awareness of discrimination.

→ If we remain at the level of listening to testimony, which is by nature irrefutable, dialogue is uncertain. Learning together is key. As a structure with an emancipatory role to play, it seems essential to foster a respectful working environment for all those who work here (including permanent theatre staff, temporary workers, and visiting artistic teams). To this end, the MC93 has decided to launch a seminar on the issue of racism.

The main goal is to raise our teams' awareness of the root causes of racism and all the problematic behaviours and statements that stem from them, to provide concrete tools for recognizing and combating discrimination, and to promote open and constructive dialogue about these sensitive issues.

In 2024, speakers (academics, authors, activists) specializing in anti-racism and the social sciences will be invited. Preliminary discussions with the speakers will help us share the professional context of the MC93 so that they can adapt their approach to the subject and identify-specific subjects of reflection. Concrete examples and case studies will also be used.

These experts will contribute their scientific knowledge, field experience, and enlightened perspectives on the social dynamics associated with racism, while taking great care not to dismiss anyone's personal feelings and experiences.

These presentations will address the theoretical aspects of the issue, but also encourage exchange and discussion within our teams. They will also be offered to young people from our preparatory classes, the youth council, and other student groups with whom we work.

Between three and four meetings will take place between May and December 2024, as well as a film screening.

The proceedings of these sessions will be documented so that they can serve as physical teaching resources available to everyone.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Ultimately, the aim is to enlist the help of guest speakers to set up an internal protocol to prevent and report inappropriate behaviour and comments. A member of the permanent team will be appointed to act as guarantor of this protocol, responsible for collecting testimonials. MC93 will draw from the methods and systems recently put in place to combat sexual and gender-based violence and harassment.

In addition to the seminars, a library open to staff will be set up, containing various works from a bibliography currently being compiled internally at MC93 and within the *Common Stories* network.

The execution of this training project is part of our commitment to instilling an exemplary professional environment, where every individual feels respected and valued. Given that not all team members are concerned in the same way by these issues, this initiative might give rise to stress and tensions, but going through this stage seems essential to contribute to the individual development of our teams over the long term, and to reinforce the positioning of MC93 as a socially responsible structure, through its missions on the one hand, and its work ethic on the other.

WHAT'S MORE?

MC93 will be supporting Saphir Belkheir's project to produce a handbook for teachers and artists involved in transmission, particularly within the fields of performing and circus arts. Once tested by a number of artists and reviewed through the expert lens of the PR teams at MC93 and the Centre National de la Danse, this French-language guide will be translated in English.

Read Saphir's testimonial [p.07](#)

Who?

The Good Practices Factory 2023 in Bobigny was led by:

Hortense Archambault, General and Artistic Director, MC93 | **Margault Chavaroche**, Director of Audiences, MC93 | **Elsa Mahi**, Production Manager, MC93 |
As well as the MC93 teams

A CONVERSATION WITH...

Saphir Belkheir Angles vifs (Live Zones)

Saphir Belkheir, one of the artists involved in *CommonLAB2023*, has been working for several months on a handbook of best practices for welcoming participants to workshops and laboratories. Here's his story...

Saphir Belkheir (SB): *Angles vifs (Live Zones)* is the name of this manual, which counters dead zones, or blind spots. It also makes me think of those edges on tables and furniture that we're always bumping into... The idea is to define lines of work and to underline areas of attention around which, I think, there's a lot of work to be done.

I haven't taken any dance classes, so to speak, but I have done a lot of workshops, so I'm almost a workshop expert! And I thought I might have something to contribute by mixing these practices of transmission with other contexts in which I find myself or have been involved: activist contexts, collectives, and self-management practices. I've started to address these questions in the framework of the Exerce Master, and this is also what I'm offering to introduce to the CND, as part of the *Camping*¹ programme next June.

What shape will your project take?

SB: I've offered setting up a kind of booth to bring the question to life. So that we can welcome people who would like to discuss this topic together. Because, even if I have some initial ideas and have taken some training courses, I also want to talk to other people, hear what they have to say, and observe what's going on... The idea isn't to be a complaint bureau either, so I need to find a framework and tools that work, so I can gather thoughts on the spot. At the same time, I think it's important to spend time with stakeholders from different groups. Finally, I'd like to organize a public discussion entitled "Workshop: Safe Space, Brave Space² or Responsible Space?" I'd like to question the use of English: why make this detour to avoid saying things plainly in French? Safe space has invaded the so-called inclusive discourse – as a cover, a solution. Before, it was the notion of benevolent spaces, a term I was already questioning...

Why?

SB: Because I think that benevolence implies malevolence, whereas we know that, as a general rule, nobody wants to do harm. As for "safe space", why wave a banner over an approach to show that you're well-intentioned?

Obviously, everyone wants to do good. The next step would be to find out how to guarantee that. Not just by relying on everyone's willpower, but by really educating ourselves... I first heard the term "safe space" in non-mixed contexts, which already raises questions in my mind, because non-mixed contexts are tantamount to essentializing the people within them. As if, among people of North African origin, for example, we were necessarily incapable of showing racism towards people hailing from North Africa. That's a bit naïve, and a pity...

As for the notion of "brave space", it comes down to valuing and highlighting people who speak out about problems in certain contexts. I'm personally touched by this, as I often find myself taking the floor. However, I don't believe that speaking out is essentially a question of courage. Sometimes, there is an

irrepressible need for change in an oppressive context that makes it impossible to do otherwise. This is where the concept of "brave space" is important, because, by valuing people who speak out, we give them the responsibility to take a stand – a responsibility that belongs to them.

However, this valuing of speaking out can sometimes lead to certain excesses. If, for example, somebody in a workshop can stop everything just by saying that there has been a homophobic act, word, or attitude. This can jeopardize the very practice of the workshop, the very reason for coming. This doesn't mean that we should keep quiet, but rather that we need to put in place tools to avoid this kind of racist or X-phobic demonstration. And if this does occur, we need to know how to defuse it and bounce back. And we don't usually teach this to artists. Likewise, while some artists ask themselves these questions in their practice, they are not necessarily teachers in the field.

Overall, a lot of responsibility falls on the artists' shoulders. I'm under the impression that, as creative people, we are more or less pushed to have the answer for everything. For some time now, for example, there have been a lot of calls for residencies around the theme of ecology. Are artists really going to put an end to the environmental crisis?

Questions of identity are my emergency, and in my opinion, they are primordial, indeed we can't do ecology if we don't know ourselves.

What are the concrete tools that could be put in place?

SB: Since February, I've been overseeing somatic practice, dance, and performance workshops for trans people in Marseille. As part of these workshops, we're thinking about drawing up a chart setting out the minimum information we need to have, and what should be systematically stated before starting a workshop. For example, to say that you have the right not to do certain things, or to leave the space... Because, whether you like it or not, the person running the workshop is the authority figure when dealing with a participant, and you might feel blocked when faced with certain situations created by this dynamic. It therefore seems important to me to name the situations that engage those gathered in the workshop, explaining, for example, the connection we're going to make. Sometimes an artist seeks to generate material for a future creation but doesn't necessarily say so. Explaining what you want to do and to what end, inviting everyone to introduce themselves, however briefly, preparing participants for what they are going to receive/go through, being attentive to how people perceive each other, and avoiding feminine/masculine separations – these are all practices that can defuse any tensions before they arise...

¹ A festival and an international platform for workshops and performances organized by the Centre National de la Danse (CND)

² In English in the original French text

This is focused on the facilitator, but is your manual also addressing the participants?

SB: Yes. That's the "responsible" space that I'm referring to. How do you create workshop spaces that allow those present to take responsibility too?

How do we deal with the fact that an artist or participant may be unintentionally racist or discriminatory? How can we create a working environment for everyone?

The more clearly defined the framework, the more reassuring and comfortable it is for everyone. For example, some people need to understand in advance what's going to happen, how the different schedules and breaks are going to play out...

But does this leave room for the unexpected, for the shifts that are sometimes at the heart of certain artistic practices, particularly when exploring?

SB: This manual doesn't claim to be the answer to every situation, and all the better. It's rather about creating a more inclusive studio culture. Having attention points in mind helps us deal with the unexpected.

The reason I'm so keen to challenge the notion of a "safe space" is because I've seen time and again that it implies that nothing is supposed to happen. It implies a kind of guaranteed comfort. But in everyday life, this is not the case. I don't know of any place that guarantees 100% freedom from systemic oppression, so why should I feel safe in a workshop? It's like sanctifying artistic practices and their spaces, and I think that's dangerous. It's at this point that I propose turning dead zones into living ones.

That reminds me of gated communities³. On the inside, it's beautiful and safe, and on the outside, it's hard and dangerous. How can we give life to these essential approaches and avoid creating fear in an increasingly fractured world?

SB: Yes, the phenomenon of polarization. Where everyone is in their own corner, and we're the good guys. That's why I don't claim to have all the answers, but rather to be helping to create a new culture. There's an urgent need to bounce back, given what we're going through politically, especially within institutions that are still somewhat comfortable, in contexts we still depend on, for the most part.

Does this notion of live zones also apply to your creative work?

SB: I try to distinguish this reflection from my creative work, although in both cases it's based on personal experience. However, on the creative side, I apply it in a different, poetic way. There are things I want to say, to do, or to dance on stage. Things I want to push forward more concretely in practice, but which also lead me to create shows. So it's a never-ending loop.

Interview by **Virginie Dupray**, April 2024



A Franco-Algerian artist based in Marseille, Saphir Belkheir (1991) creates poetic dialogues tinged with simplicity and radicalism. Partly self-taught, he combines choreographic practice with visual art, and is influenced by hip-hop and popular aesthetics. He is currently working on a forthcoming solo produced by the MC93 as part of *Common Stories*.

³ Gated community are a form of residential community or housing estate containing strictly controlled entrances, and often characterized by a closed perimeter of walls and fences. Source: Wikipedia



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THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN BRUSSELS

Collectively Reflecting
on the Values of Diversity

“One of the priorities of the Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles project is to establish exemplary governance – encompassing management, employment, gender equity, and cultural diversity – deeply linked to our artistic project and based on relationships with teams, audiences, and artists. It aims to foster new experiments, narratives, hybridizations and transdisciplinarity in programming, the choice of guest artists, audience development, and the very professions that are our own.”

Pierre Thys, General and Artistic Director, Théâtre National, June 2021

A NEW DIRECTION

Founded in 1945 and based in the heart of Brussels, the Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles (Théâtre National) started a new chapter with the arrival of its new director, Pierre Thys, in 2021. His involvement in the *Common Stories* project, and more specifically the *Good Practices Factory*, is part of this desire for an inclusive, best-practice dynamic to respond to today’s political, social, and cultural challenges and reinforce common grounds within the organization.

STARTING WITH THE TEAMS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND DIVERSITY

The Théâtre National therefore chose to see the teams as a starting point to launch a reflection on the values of diversity, under the guidance of Safia Kessas - journalist, director and member of the *Common Stories* Advisory Committee, and Laurie Hanquinet - Doctor in political and social sciences at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, focusing on the performing arts and diversity.

How is diversity experienced within and between teams, between teams and outside artists, and how is it perceived in programming? In concrete terms, the 2023-24 season was devoted to diagnosing the situation through a series of five collective workshops with the various theatre teams that guaranteed the freest possible spaces for expression. It was about identifying internally the different takes on diversity. Through questions and information, participants from the same team reacted, dialogued, and nourished the group’s reflection within the institution.

Three meetings have already taken place: on August 17th, November 10th, and November 27th, 2023. The last two will be held in June 2024. Each meeting is transcribed in full for later analysis. A workshop on gender bias, led by Annalisa Casini, professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Education at the University of Louvain, was also held on April 26th, 2024.

At the same time, the Théâtre National is committed to bolstering a library that specifically concentrates on diversity issues and that staff can access to nourish and pursue their reflections.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Following the June meetings, a conclusion will be drawn up and initial recommendations will be shared with the Théâtre National team.

On this basis, a diversity plan will be set up. It will be steered by a support committee, made up of one volunteer per department and one deputy, with a rotating presidency. This working group will determine the next steps to be taken, as well as the approaches and methods to be implemented.

Who?

The Good Practices Factory 2023 in Brussels was led by:

Safia Kessas, journalist, filmmaker, activist, member of the *Common Stories* Advisory Committee | **Laurie Hanquinet**, Professor of Sociology at the Université Libre de Bruxelles | **Isabelle Collard**, Head of Public Relation and Cultural Mediation at Théâtre National | As well as the Théâtre National Human Resources team

A CONVERSATION WITH...

Antoine Hennart and Marie-Pauline Fouquet

Antoine Hennart and Marie-Pauline Fouquet, members of the Théâtre National team, took part in the *Good Practices Factory* Brussels meetings organized by Safia Kessas and Laura Hanquinet. Here's a look back...

Can you describe your role at the Théâtre National in a few words?

Antoine Hennart (AH): I'm a ticketing assistant. This means I'm in charge of the sales department: ticketing, after-sales service, welcoming the public during the day and evening for sales, and collecting and/or reprinting tickets.

Marie-Pauline Fouquet (M-P F): I'm a hall manager. That means I hold an iron hand over reception and the team of ushers at the Théâtre National. [Laughs] I feel like I'm in the thick of things, in direct daily contact with the public.

Before taking part in this GFP meeting, was the theme of diversity present in your professional and/or personal life?

AH: Yes, because I'm part of the LGBTQIA+ community, and I've also done a lot of volunteer work for the Grands Carmes⁴ association. I've given a few training courses on welcoming the public and volunteered to help HIV-positive people in discussion groups. I also read and keep myself informed. From a professional point of view, the fact that the workshops and meetings are taking place more than two years after Pierre Thys' arrival is a bit late for me. Because in our teams, we have quite a few colleagues for whom these topics are not obvious. Since then, I've found myself having discussions with colleagues, and educating them, which is a bit of a burden. In a perfect world, we should have set up these workshops when Pierre first took office. We should have prepared the ground.

M-P F: Of course, because I'm the genuine article when it comes to diversity! I'm a black woman of mixed race. And these are issues that are close to my heart. Particularly when it comes to building my team. I came to the Théâtre National with a team – this isn't easy to say – that was very white. You could count the racialized people. As far as I know, there is still no disabled staff. It was a very socially and ethnically homogeneous team. So, of course, I built a team that stood out from that. Because that's very visible. And the visibility we can create today is very important. During a SACHA⁵ Plan training session, I was delighted to hear my colleagues proudly tell the trainers that in my team there was no classism, homophobia, ageism or validism. It made me very proud. Because obviously, it's something I'm trying to build, but I have never told them, "You know, I don't want this and that in the team". They saw it, and they grasped it

Was it important for you to discuss these issues: practices for welcoming new projects, audiences, recruitment, in relation to the theatre's new artistic orientations, or more broadly, as concerns the Brussels context?

AH: Yes, it's essential that there are other moments of sharing than just those with the public at our box office. Every month, we put on

at least one show dealing with minority or diversity issues. As the saying goes, it puts the church back in the heart of the town. Safia Kessas and Laurie Hanquinet came with facts, figures, and studies. Of course, this revealed the disparity of opinions on these issues. For example, Safia asked us if "the diversity of employees at the National Theatre is representative of the diversity of Brussels?" My manager Dominique [de Guchteneere], who is in his sixties, and very knowledgeable and open-minded, thought so. Our colleague Cinzia [Maroni] couldn't hold back. She burst out laughing. She drew a comparison with surveys on housing in Brussels 1000⁶. Around us, more people are in a precarious state, with tenants in old housing. We're whiter, richer and better dressed.

We also discussed positive discrimination. If we start from the premise that there's a lack of diversity in the Théâtre National teams, and in the cultural sector more generally, we can ask ourselves: Where does this come from? Maybe from hiring practices? However, some colleagues believe that positive discrimination is in itself discrimination, and discrimination is a flat "no". In fact, everyone has biases, including committed people. Unconsciously, you always choose the candidate who looks most like yourself.

As for Brussels, it's the capital, but really, it's a large provincial city. It's been through wave after wave of immigration, and it's a leopard-spotted map. You don't have the rich on one side, and the poor on the other. There really are islands everywhere. To talk about a Moroccan from Brussels doesn't make sense. Because there's a great diversity of Moroccans in Brussels! It's a huge job to think about and welcome diversity here. You can't talk about diversity without mentioning the difficulties certain minorities have in getting through the door of a theatre, crossing the threshold of a hospital, gaining access to healthcare, and accessing their rights, quite simply. So, it's essential to ask questions about this.

M-P F: Absolutely. I think it's very important to educate people on all sorts of levels. Work is in progress on this, particularly in relation to the acceptance of people with disabilities, sexual orientation, race – even if race doesn't exist, but as a sociologically constructed reality. I really think we have a long way to go on these issues. There's no perfect world, but we can work towards it, we can try to do better. I think trial and error is a good way too. We can "tend towards".

In your opinion, did this format enable everyone to speak out and be heard?

M-P F: Yes, in a limited way. It's complicated, when you get several people together and try to let everyone express themselves to their heart's content. And above all, we don't all have the same starting point on these issues.

⁴ A project led by Brussels-based associations to create a community and health centre and a café dedicated to LGBTQIA+ people

⁵ Plan to fight gender-based and sexual violence, especially designed for the party scene

⁶ Centre of Brussels where the Théâtre National is located

What was your experience like? Were you surprised, touched, or disturbed at any point?

AH: The team is great and very caring. Some of them recounted personal, intimate and moving experiences, and we were blown away. Cinzia, for example, told us about a childhood memory. She comes from a small, remote village in Italy. When she was 7 or 8 years old, she thought that all the street vendors who rang her doorbell had one profession: Moroccan. That being “Moroccan” was a job. Until one day a gentleman rang the bell, she opened the door and shouted to her mother, “Mom, there’s a Moroccan here”. And the gentleman said, “No, I’m from Mali”. That’s when she realized that being Moroccan wasn’t a job! As far as I’m concerned, I didn’t feel I was learning anything new on the subject. Given my identity and the people I encounter, I think about it almost every day. But this was a sharing experience, with people who don’t agree.

M-P F: I’m also always very interested in this kind of encounter. I can be surprised by certain remarks or questions from colleagues, like “White privilege, I don’t know what that is”. And I realize that in everyday life, if you don’t know a gay person, or a disabled person, or a racialized person, in fact, you don’t ask yourself these questions. I wonder: What kind of world are we living in? What kind of world have they grown up in and lived in? Why haven’t they asked themselves certain questions about these issues? I’m one of those people who think you always have to do more. As I said at the beginning, we’ve never really reached the bottom of these issues. There’s always a blind spot – a question we haven’t asked ourselves. It’s a little like continuing education.

What do you see as the next step in this process? What are your expectations?

AH: That’s the difficulty. Doing training once is useful, but you have to keep updating it. We don’t have the instructions on paper for welcoming trans people, even though it’s really not that complicated to write...

There’s no malice inside the teams or in management, but we do have a problem. When it comes to welcoming people deemed “different”, we’re no better than Coca Cola. We still don’t have reserved areas for wheelchair users in the main hall. We have no clear process for accommodating them in the studio and small room. The reception desk is on a slope. We still don’t have a shelf at the ticket office to put your bag on, or a hook to hang your umbrella. There’s no bar to rest on, for semi-standing guests. Which means that if you’re on a waiting list, you have to wait standing up. So, we still have a long way to go...

M-P F: Yes! For example, with my team, I asked for basic sign language training. Just to be able to say “Hello”. It’s like when you go abroad, you at least learn to say “Hello” and “Thank you”. So, you can communicate a little. And above all, so you know how things are done. Touching people you don’t know, for example, just isn’t done. My team and I try to be warm with the spectators we know, but we don’t touch people. On the contrary, the trainer, who was deaf herself, told us: “You shouldn’t hesitate to touch a deaf person”. It’s not something that comes naturally. We’re a building, and we’re a tool which is what it is today, which can evolve, but which can’t be radically transformed. And so, I think there’s an enormous amount of work to be done by us, by the teams. I particularly remember an audience member in a wheelchair. He asked me to go round the theatre: “How do I get to this room? Ah, there are three rooms, but how do I get there?” At the end, I asked him: “What do you think of the building?” He replied: “Honestly, I’m not at all happy with the building, but I have to say that you and your team make up for it with the quality of your welcome”. It’s a pleasure, but it also means that we have a lot of room for improvement. Generally speaking, I’d like to see more training. I think that as an institution, we can all do it together. We need to remain open. It’s the journey of a lifetime, mine at the Théâtre National, but also that of the establishment.

Interviews by **Sylvia Botella**, April 2024

A CONVERSATION WITH...

Laurie Hanquinet

At the invitation of and with Safia Kessas, Laurie Hanquinet prepared, moderated, and documented a series of meetings on diversity issues with Théâtre National teams. Interview...

Can you say a few words about your background and your work? I believe you've carried out several studies on the audiences of cultural institutions...

Laurie Hanquinet (LH): I began my career focusing on cultural practices in relation to social and urban inequalities. In 2022-23, I also conducted a major quantitative survey of performing artists in French-speaking Belgium, involving over 500 questionnaires and some sixty interviews, about unequal access to careers. We'll soon be publishing a paper drawn from this survey on motherhood, about how motherhood can be an obstacle for women artists, whether they want children or not, with a whole series of stereotypes associated with the potential child-bearing woman.

I also analysed the programs of six theatre venues in Brussels to see to what extent they reflected socio-ethnic and gender diversity. To what extent is race an obstacle to careers, with the existence of patterns in which non-white people, or those perceived as such, are either not very visible on stage or are reduced to stereotypes...

What protocol did you establish with Safia for the Théâtre National?

LH: First of all, the group sessions were essential due to time restraints - our own, but also those of the busy teams, and finally because of the schedule proposed by the Théâtre National. What can you do in the time available? To gain a better understanding of what was going on in employees' day-to-day lives, we decided to group the participants by department to highlight certain differences in perception and practices between teams. Each session lasted between two-and-a-half and three hours. We came up with a list of semi-directive questions - open-ended enough to allow people to express themselves - as well as real-life examples. As well as videos and newspaper articles, such as an article about a Belgian institution deprived of subsidies due to a lack of parity, or about the controversy surrounding Rebecca Chaillon's show in Avignon. In the end, however, we didn't make much use of that media content, because conversation happened fairly easily. I was touched by the sincerity of the people involved, despite the social and collective dynamics that are always at play in a group. I clearly felt that people wanted to talk...

However, did you feel any tension around questions which can very quickly refer to personal and intimate values and feelings?

LH: There were indeed tensions, with very different points of view within the same team. But the dialogue never stopped. Those who wanted to were able to express themselves. The greatest tension crystallized around the question about whether to focus on specific groups we would like to see more within the theatre, whether on stage, in the audience or in the teams, or whether, on the contrary, to think that diversity in itself cannot be defined, and that limiting it to fixed objectives would reduce it. However, no one questioned the need to increase diversity.

Have you observed different perceptions in different professions, with varying degrees of proximity to artists and audiences?

LH: I have the feeling that there were more or less the same tensions within the different groups, though with a difference in the ability to articulate those tensions, and in the ability to justify one's position and to listen to others.

Will the diversity of programming sought by management eventually lead to greater audience diversity?

LH: It seems that if you put people with different backgrounds and histories on stage, the audience changes too. If you invite a queer racialized slammer, she'll come with her audience, who will follow her to different venues, but won't necessarily come back to the Théâtre National. Can these audiences still be considered Théâtre National audiences? That's something we didn't really talk about much in these group discussions. How do we hook into this diversity, to be more than a kind of symbol or just tokenism⁷? How do we drive real change? I don't have any miracle solution...

⁷ Tokenism is the practice of making only a symbolic effort to be inclusive to members of minority groups, especially by recruiting people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of racial or gender equality within a workplace or educational context. Source: Wikipedia

Having worked on these issues for a long time, do you feel a growing polarization in audiences, with less and less crossover?

LH: What I see above all is steadiness. I don't see much change in the data and statistics we have on cultural participation. However, not everyone has to go to the museum or the theatre. The real issue is about equality of opportunity. Do we all have the same resources and the same tools to choose whether or not to go? I'm not aiming for a homogenization of cultural practices, as some thinkers such as Bourdieu may have advocated. Everyone should go to the theatre, to the museum, through a certain sacralization of culture. That's not my position. It also means that we need to work on the cultural offer, especially in public institutions, and I think that's what the Théâtre National is trying to implement. There is also currently a political will on the part of the Belgian Ministry of Culture to promote greater diversity, but there is also resistance.



Laurie Hanquinet is Professor of Sociology at the Université Libre de Bruxelles.

In your opinion, should we consider these different diversity issues linked to gender, disability, social diversity, ethnic and cultural diversity across the board? Or should they each be approached in their own specific way?

LH: The question of intersectionality is of course at the heart of a lot of current thinking. What are the norms? It's by looking at norms that we can start to unravel them. However, we must recognize that there are very different exclusion mechanisms depending on the source of discrimination. Take maternity, for example. If you're a man and your partner is expecting a child, this won't work against you.

Now that these words have been collected, are there any expectations on the part of the people interviewed?

LH: I did sense some expectations, such as the need to relay certain requests. The need to provide teams with more resources and tools, so that they can better interact with greater diversity. Some people feel very helpless when it comes to the theatre's new direction. You have to listen to them and recognize that not everyone is equipped in the same way. Safia and I came up with the idea of creating a toolbox, whose form has yet to be defined. Something more dynamic and more fluid than courses or slightly condescending recommendations. For example, when dealing with non-binary people, some of us don't really know how to address them. So, to avoid offending them, we prefer to steer clear of them... Then, there's a real need for discussion, so that it's not just management who decides and the teams who follow and execute.

Interview by **Virginie Dupray**, April 2024

Da autoridade da inércia à radicalidade do reparável

Anabela Rodrigues, Apolo de Carvalho, Cristina Roldão, Gessica Correia Borges, Kitty Furtado



20 November round table © Joni Rico

THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN LISBON

How to Shift Boundaries

THE START OF THE JOURNEY

When some years ago, we came up with *Common Stories* together, the *Good Practices Factory* were not only presented as an activity, but as a leading question: “The *Good Practices Factory*. Can it achieve a shift?” and goes on to specify “How to analyze existing barriers, stumbling blocks, and wrong paths to improve invention and building processes. To develop multiple practices fairly and respectfully in order to embrace diversity and equity: diversity of stories and/or of the hosted artists. Diversity within our teams, diversity of practices and professional contexts, and diversity of audiences and users.”

These are questions that Culturgest (CG) has been dealing with over the past years through its ongoing practice of opening its stages to multiple voices and places of belonging. The work with afro-descendent and black communities was already present in our artistic and discursive program, so *Common Stories* was a great opportunity to reexamine these practices and further develop the relationship with these communities. In this context, it felt not only right, but even urgent to set out a path of collaboration with the recently created organization UNA, the União Negra das Artes (Black Union of Arts, see **p.17**).

Mark Deputter, General and Artistic Director, CG

Working in a collaborative mode with UNA would not only deepen and widen the practices already in place at CG, but also foster the agency of UNA – a small-scale organization with limited resources – contributing to their activities in defense of the participation and visibility of black artists in the Portuguese arts world. Therefore, we developed an alliance between the *Good Practices Factory* of *Common Stories* and UNA’s project of producing an anti-racist manual for the fields of art and art education. The name “manual” does not necessarily refer, in this context, to a closed publication with a set of dos and don’ts, but rather a process of accumulation and dissemination of experiences, proposals, thought experiences, and, yes, Good Practices.

In practice, we have set out on a shared journey that, within the *Common Stories* project, focuses on the performing arts sector and engages with arts professionals and other relevant stakeholders, such as artists, educators, social movements, communication officers, and a wide range of public and private entities, in order to construct this ongoing “manual” together.

ACTIVITIES IN 2023

“If the construction of a bridge does not enrich the consciousness of those who work on it, then the bridge should not be built.”

Frantz Omar Fanon

The work developed in 2023 started out with a series of meetings and conversations with members of UNA – especially with the artist and researcher Raquel Lima (also a member of the *Common Stories* Advisory Committee) – in order to establish the basic principles of our collaboration.

Out of these conversations grew the desire to organize a public event, curated by Raquel Lima and co-organized with UNA, in the context of the *Good Practices Factory* annual meeting that took place in Lisbon on November 20th, 2023.

Having chosen to focus our efforts on supporting the long-term work of the afro-descendant communities on the right to tell their stories on stage, we presented a day of encounters and talks to instigate action and reflection on the stories and experiences of this community in their relationship with performing art institutions. The programme was targeted for artists and professionals of art institutions but was also open to the general audience.

REFRAMING AUTHORITY AND AUTHORSHIP IN THE ARTS: WEAVING LINES OF REPARATION

“If the construction of a bridge does not enrich the consciousness of those who work on it, then the bridge should not be built.”

It is from this premise by Franz Fanon that the programme was shaped, with the expectation of reflecting on logics of artistic extractivism, authorial dismissal, cultural racism, as well as of proposing pedagogies of transgression and radical insurrections in the artistic domain. At a historical moment in which the concept of diversity tends to empty itself of meaning in discourses about culture, how can we address dimensions of authority and authorship in order to facilitate (and perhaps accelerate) the thinking through and implementing of reparations and social justice?

The morning was dedicated to a *Theoretical and Practical Workshop, Anti-Racist Lines for Art/Education*, attended by professionals from different Portuguese performing art institutions as well as universities. In the afternoon three public talks or round tables were open to the public: *Fanon Pharmacy – Grammars of the Blue* by Vânia Gala; a round table *From the Authority of Inertia to the Radicality of the Repairable* with Anabela Rodrigues, Apolo de Carvalho, Cristina Roldão, Gessica Correia Borges and Kitty Furtado; and a talk by Jota Mombaça.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In November 2024, one year after the first November 2023 workshop and jointly with UNA, a second workshop will be held. *Care Pathways in Performing Arts Practice in Portugal* will engage performing arts professionals and institutions in the co-construction of a good practice/antiracist manual and will seek to design itineraries of care in performing arts practice. The goal is to question ways to cultivate affection and care in collective creative processes, while thinking about future possibilities in a context where the arts play an increasingly necessary role for a transformative imagination.

Who?

The Good Practices Factory Lisbon 2023 was led by:

Mark Deputter, General and Artistic Director, CG | **Raquel Lima**, UNA member, member of the *Common Stories* Advisory Committee | **Liliana Coutinho**, Head of Conferences & Debates Programming, CG | **Carolina Mano Marques**, Executive Assistant and Head of European Projects, CG | As well as UNA members

“When we talk about black consciousness / racial consciousness, it’s on a different level from simply understanding and experiencing racism in everyday life. It’s on a level of politicization that places us within a social movement that fights against racism, sexism, and multiple other forms of discrimination against black people, especially women and young people.”

Sueli Carneiro, UNA member

União Negra das Artes (UNA) is an initiative that arises within the scope of the anti-racist struggle and the affirmation of blackness and black communities in Portugal, with an emphasis on the various recent demonstrations and debates around human rights, the decolonization of knowledge and the valorisation of the artistic legacy-culture led by black people. The association was founded in April 2021 to defend the specific interests of blackness in the cultural sector, considering the historical continuities of colonial racism that maintain deep asymmetries and hinder the creation, fructification, access, production, programming, and, consequently, black representation in the artistic sector in Portugal. The main objectives are the promotion, increase, and strengthening of black representation in the Portuguese artistic field, as well as the recognition and appreciation of the intangible heritage of the black population in Portugal.

For more information:
uniaonegradasartes.pt

Find out more about the day’s programme

MORNING

→ *ANTI-RACIST LINES FOR ART AND EDUCATION: WEAVING TOGETHER PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE*
by UNA: Dori Nigro and Melissa Rodrigues
Anti-Racist Lines for Art/Education. What are they? What is their purpose? And for whom? These are some of the opening questions that we came across in an attempt to materialize the desire to create an object that critically reflects reality and that questions and speculates more supportive, plural, and horizontal paths for the future in artistic and educational thinking-making. With art having the power to transform, create representations, and reach other realities and dimensions of feeling-thinking, these Anti-Racist Lines that are now woven by several hands, are rooted in the knowledge, practices, and listening of black artists, activists, thinkers, and educators. It strives to be a mediator-repairer-object for a pedagogy of the transgression that promotes effective changes in curricula, representations, and ways of thinking and doing.

AFTERNOON

→ *FANON PHARMACY - GRAMMARS OF THE BLUE*
by Vânia Gala
A performance/conversation around a long table, *Fanon Pharmacy* started with the idea of tastes and smells as a sensorial opening to the world, revealing the intersections of human-non-human relations inscribed in them, shaped by colonial history.

→ *FROM THE AUTHORITY OF INERTIA TO THE RADICALITY OF THE REPAIRABLE*
by Anabela Rodrigues, Apolo de Carvalho, Cristina Roldão, Gessica Correia Borges and Kitty Furtado
Social and associative movements, artists, and researchers from black communities, being historically subjected to precarious conditions, occupy a strategic position in the theoretical-practical formulation of reparation policies. However, they are still limited by the highly questionable idea of the unconstitutionality of affirmative action measures, a discourse that is promoted and reproduced through government bodies, conservative academia, the cultural sector, and civil society in a widespread way. This round table focuses on debating how to repair what is repairable in the cultural sector, as well as how to overcome the authority of established inertia and identify radical paths towards social justice.

→ *LIMITE*
by Jota Mombaça
How can we practice thinking beyond imposed limits? How can we think through movement and transformation? This conference developed a reflection on the notions of subject and author, as well as their constitutive limits. Building on black, indigenous, and transfeminist traditions, Jota Mombaça explored the multiple temporalities of activism and social transformation, with a special focus on the here and now – that spiral dimension of time and space, in which past, present, and future converge in predictable and unpredictable ways.

To know more
Antirracismo na praça pública
<https://www.culturgest.pt>



Fashion Pharmacy by Vaniq Gala © Joni Rico

A Few Notes and Principles about an Antiracist Manual in the Fields of the Arts

by Raquel Lima

As part of the ongoing conversations between CG and UNA regarding the development of an Antiracist Manual in the Fields of Arts and Education, Raquel Lima wrote the following thoughts, reviewing key concepts such as whiteness, gatekeeping⁸, reparation and tokenism⁹.

INTRODUCTION: DISTRIBUTING DECISION-MAKING POWER

The distribution of decision-making power can materialise in different contexts, but generally refers to the moment when Historically Privileged White People (HPWP¹⁰) in decision-making positions relinquish their power, temporarily or permanently, in favour of People from Historically Oppressed Social Groups (PHOSG¹¹).

Despite the transformative potential of this moment, it is one of extreme fragility – either because HPWP are not usually familiar or comfortable with articulating this distribution, or because PHOSG need as much articulation and concretion about this procedure as possible to feel secure, outside the scope of the usual extractivism, tokenism, and instrumentalization. For this moment not to lose its purpose and/or fall into contradiction, some considerations must be taken into account.

I. A SAFE PLACE

1. Before the moment of decision-making power distribution, meetings between HPWP are necessary. They should be inscribed in the theoretical line of a critical social analysis of whiteness, considering the position in which subjects identified as white acquire symbolic and material privileges in relation to non-white ones, based on a tendency tied to the inheritances of the white cis-gender patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist system. These meetings will serve to define the best approach for a collaboration/invitation and the level of articulation, involvement, and participation HPWP wish to have in the process. A concrete proposal, albeit open and flexible, is always preferable.

2. The definition of the expected role of the PHOSG is of utmost importance and should be the starting point for a dialogue. A safe place is a place where the roles of the different stakeholders are clearly defined, and the reflection of participants valued as a working practice.

3. The individual or collective invitation should rely on accurate knowledge of the path of the PHOSG or their collectives/organizations. It is a basic way to measure the degree of commitment of the HPWP to the proposal they present. It is important to do and recognize this homework as a foundation for a safe place, based on genuine interest.

4. Considering the fallacy of the meritocracy principle, it is important to recognize the path of a PHOSG and/or the collective/group he/she/they is/are part of, highlighting its achievements and successes, but, above all, understanding the structural difficulties that were overcome to achieve them.

⁸ A gatekeeper is a person who controls who is granted access to a category or status. Source: Wikipedia

⁹ Tokenism is the practice of making only a symbolic effort to be inclusive to members of minority groups, especially by recruiting people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of racial or gender equality within a workplace or educational context. Source: Wikipedia

¹⁰ Acronym coined by Raquel Lima for Historically Privileged White People

¹¹ Acronym coined by Raquel Lima for People from Historically Oppressed Social Groups in order to include racialised people, but also sexual and gender dissidents and people in precarious socio-economic situations, among others

II. THE INDIVIDUAL VS. THE COLLECTIVE

1. Not all collectives and associations have leaders, representatives, or spokespersons. Invitations to collectives should be forwarded to the respective contacts of the collectives, thus avoiding a PHOSG being “trapped” in a position to represent a collective when this does not correspond to the way it works.

2. Collectives have very specific internal dynamics and timings, often advocate a horizontal character, accommodate different areas of action, and have a pre-defined plan of activities. So, the earlier you invite a collective the better. Short-term management should be avoided.

3. In the case of collectives, even more notice is needed, given that they are historically exposed to precarious situations that imply a division into different functions, tasks, places, and jobs.

4. Invitations to collectives with little notice may be read as the assumption that collectives are monoliths, without considering that diversity within groups implies time for discussion in order to reach consensus.

5. Even if PHOSG are part of collectives, this does not summarize/enclose their singularity or subjectivity, since each person has his or her own views, and a collective is composed of several voices in search of tuning and consensus.

6. There are structural differences between an individual collaboration, a collaboration in which a working group is created for this purpose, and a collaboration with an existing association or collective. The role and nature of an invitation should be clearly defined to avoid a PHOSG being exposed to different invitations for the same meeting, as this implies an effort to adapt to different proposals from different prisms, and a superhuman attempt to respond, individually and collectively, simultaneously.

7. Moreover, such a dynamic would carry a dimension of erasure and relativization of what would be a unique point of view on a given subject.

III. INITIATIVE, DECISION-MAKING POWER, LEADERSHIP, AND RESPONSIBILITY

The assumption of joint construction based on listening is healthy. However, it is important not to confuse initiative, decision-making power, leadership, and responsibility.

1. Initiative

→ Since this is a moment of distribution of decision-making power, initiative will always be on the side of the one who has that power, i.e. HPWP. The illusion that PHOSG are given space, voice, and initiative is not only paternalistic, but also undermines

the genuine need for a structure to recognize the gaps, failures, and patterns it perpetuates.

→ It is important that these moments are recognized as requests for help and advice from HPWP, allowing the expansion of practices, the possibility of listening and self-reflection, and the deepening of programming.

2. Decision-Making Power

→ PHOSG’s decision-making power will only come into effect after the darkening of some stages with the structures, concerning the moulds they intend to give to the collaboration, the quantity of tasks devoted to the activities, dedicated time and respective remuneration, the budgetary management of the initiative, the freedom of thought associated to the definition of activities, and the level of participation that the structure itself intends to maintain throughout the process...

→ Very often, there is a gap between the decision-making power defined in preliminary meetings and the actual conditions encountered by PHOSG and/or collectives during the preparation and running of the activities. It is very important to anticipate mishaps, limitations, and difficulties.

3. Leadership

→ The idea of leadership cannot be dissociated from the practices of tokenism, i.e. the merely superficial or token effort to be inclusive, especially by recruiting a small number of PHOSG to give the appearance of racial or sexual equality within a workforce.

→ The acknowledgement that the formats of collaboration, partnership, commissioning, and curatorial invitations are ephemeral and occasional moments for PHOSG to assert their work and possibly reinforce collective agendas of struggle. Despite the validity and importance of moments of this nature, they do not correspond to a real restorative leadership associated with the direction and programming of cultural structures of reference in the arts sector.

4. Responsibility

→ A pluri-directional invitation that allows a PHOSG to decide if he/she/they want(s) to collaborate alone, in a team, or in the scope of a collective, transfers a responsibility incumbent on the host structure and also imposes the discomfort of an ethical dilemma for the PHOSG to resolve, since it places him/ her/ them in the position of gatekeeper.

→ Hence, the structures should not relinquish their responsibility to decide what they consider to be most beneficial for their projects. This does not mean inflexibility in the moulds and paths of collaboration. It allows a precise approach framed in a transparent way that respects the time and responsibility of the person(s) who invite(s) and denotes a real effort of self-analysis and understanding of their own limitations and lacks.

Lisbon, April 2024

Based in Lisbon, Raquel Lima is a poet, academic (University of Coimbra), and activist. She is a member of UNA, a member of the *Common Stories'* Advisory Committee, and an artistic advisor to the Alkantara festival.



The Meeting Place for Learning - Equality and Diversity - creative evaluation © Beata Boucht

THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN STOCKHOLM

Individual experiences and examples as a source of inspiration and collective knowledge

A THEATRE THAT TRAVELS THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF SWEDEN

The Riksteatern's (RT) mission is to make dance and theatre accessible to everyone in Sweden. To do this, it relies on a network of 230 local theatre associations throughout the country. Run by volunteers who devote a large part of their free time to their work, these associations decide which productions they wish to present. RT currently has around 38,000 members in Sweden.

THE "MEETING PLACE": A PLACE FOR SHARING AND LEARNING

To implement the *Good Practices Factory*, RT involved an existing group created in Spring 2022 to identify and evaluate existing inhouse knowledge and experience, the "Meeting Place for Learning - Equality and Diversity" group.

The "Meeting Place" can be seen as a journey of knowledge through different learning processes. The journey included testing different methods for collecting learning examples, creating and experimenting with workshop formats, participating in knowledge-raising lectures and study visits, watching performing arts, and producing films, texts, and podcasts. Highly explorative, it was shaped by the participants' needs based on their context and position within RT, as well as by RT's overall strategy for equality and diversity.

More concretely, each member started by listing all actions / activities related to equality and diversity that he or she already had been developing in his or her professional context. Then the needs that were still to be met were identified, and suggestions for actions to be implemented and by whom were made. Finally, in-house responsibilities were examined. Discussions led to seven "initiatives" they specifically chose to work on in the performing arts field:

- Questioning the urban norm
- Examining gender issues
- Reviewing concepts linked to equality and diversity
- Analysing template ads based on an equality perspective
- Peek and Pick (Look at what others are doing and pick what seems good)
- Developing knowledge-raising efforts
- Supporting accessibility policies

A second 6-month phase led members to work individually or in smaller groups on defined activities with an on-going dialogue with Anusha Tyson, the group coordinator. Regular group meetings took place.

THE RESULTS...

One of the results definitely lies in the working methods that the members adopted, developed, and tested, as well as resulting increased knowledge that they will hopefully share within the RT, and beyond...

Group dynamics is another achievement. The “Meeting Place” quickly became a safe place that allowed members to think big, to commit further, to test, as well as to fail and admit to shortcomings and dead ends.

More concretely, the group organized for the RT team two knowledge-raising lectures about accessibility and about gender. It produced several audiovisual or text-based objects as supports to share practical knowledge and learning examples:

- 9 *Glimpses from RT* podcasts
- 3 documentary films (shot within RT’s various operations)
- 13 *Stories of the Week* in text form
- 4 *Show and Tell stories* in text form
- 19 newsletters developing environmental analysis on the theme of equality and diversity.

Productions were shared through newsletters, on the RT website, on YouTube, and on Intranet.

WHAT’S NEXT?

A network for equality and diversity open to anyone wishing to join was launched in April 2024. The network will be the place to share tips, conduct environmental analysis, and collect suggestions...

A new training programme to increase knowledge and understanding on how to recruit a wide range of skills and how to create a sustainable work environment to grow and keep these skills will be proposed to RT’s managers in June 2024, while a reflection will be developed around children’s perspectives on equality and diversity issues.

To Watch!

A learning example on how a local theatre association is working to reach new audiences in the city of Hofors (about 7,400 inhabitants).

[Watch the video](#)



Who?

The Good Practices Factory 2023 in Stockholm was led by:

Anusha Tyson, Meeting Place coordinator | **Jessica Karlsson**, Project Assistant | **Vera Renberg, Chairman**, RT association in Piteå | **Daniel Jönsson**, member, RT association in Halmstad | **Leif Persson**, former member of the Election Committee and Auditor, RT association in Karlstad | **Ann-Cathrin Larsson**, Chairperson, RT association in Tierp | **Sofia Axelsson Lekare**, former District Audience Development Manager, RT | **Kajsa Åsheim**, Human Resources, RT | **Lisa Lindén**, former Dramaturg, RT | **Helena Ringvold**, Producer, dance department, RT | **Marzena Baranowska**, Association Developer, RT | **Birgitta Sandgren**, former Chairperson, RT association in Jönköping Län | **Sara Högdin**, Board Deputy Member, RT association in Halland

A CONVERSATION WITH...

Leif Persson

Leif Persson is one of the members of the “Meeting Place for Learning - Equality and Diversity” group. He looks back on this experience...

Could you briefly introduce yourself?

Leif Persson (LF): My name is Leif Persson, and I am a former regional officer at RT, but for a couple of years, I have been working as a volunteer for the organization. I am board member of one of the local presenters’ associations in Gnosjö.

Before taking part in the “Meeting Place”, were diversity and equality part of your professional and/or personal life?

LF: Yes, both personally and professionally. Since 2013, I have been working with an Afghan playwright who developed a project with young women in Herat, Afghanistan, focusing on sexual harassment and gender violence. Last year, we worked with her to make it possible for some of the artists of the group to leave the country. Women artists and Hazara are a very bad combination in a land ruled by the Taliban! But I’m also very engaged in working against the urban norm. I’m convinced we have to go beyond white middleclass experience if we want art to serve the whole society.

Was it important to share these concerns within a group?

LF: The group has been fantastic, in sharing, listening, and developing experiences that were brought to the table. Anusha Tyson, the group’s coordinator, has been challenging us to think outside the box. The aim of the meetings was not to agree on a shared view but rather to defend our own position and, in doing so, realize that our opinion is mostly shaped by customs and traditions and not by knowledge. Once you realize that, it’s easier to shift... New ideas emerged that I had never considered before, existing ideas were now re-examined within a deeper context and with wider perspectives.

Can you give a concrete example of a learning process and a working method that had a significant impact on you?

LF: In the beginning of our work as a group, it was a lot about getting to know each other... We did this exercise where, if you wanted to, you had to share something memorable about your childhood. It was really powerful, and we immediately got closer to each other, trusting each other, as well as the work process and the ones leading it. With this solid foundation, it was then possible to challenge ourselves, get things wrong, and sometimes make mistakes.

Interview by **Anusha Tyson**, April 2024

Excellence in Practice Through Learning Examples at RT

A FRAMEWORK

by Anusha Tyson and Ruhi Tyson

Our Context...

How can we ensure that the excellence developed among practitioners is documented and systematically developed? How can we contribute to an organization where we value skills and knowledge but also practical wisdom? How can we make our practices visible and understandable to everyone in the organization, how can we share and pass them to other team members? And how can this work contribute to RT's goals of achieving diversity on, behind, and in front of the stage? Based on recent research (Tyson 2017, 2019) and adapted to the RT context, the following text is an attempt to bring a few answers to the table, while trying to do justice to the needs of practitioners. Our approach relies on the collection and the sharing of real, concrete stories and examples of successful practice. Indeed, the RT project has been continuously generating examples of fruitful practices and initiatives, but these examples are seldom systematically documented and disseminated to increase organizational learning. Moreover, such practices very often involve elements of individual flourishing and practical wisdom. Elements that are almost impossible to apprehend outside the narrative format. Using learning examples not only covers excellence in the area of practical knowledge but also excellence in the sense of supporting human flourishing and the development of wise and enriching practices at RT.

Another characteristic is that such excellence tends to remain tacit, i.e. personal, untold, and mostly unshared, making it difficult to engage in more systematic reflections to develop these virtuous practices, to make them largely accessible, but also to analyse deficits or blind spots.

Nevertheless, we are convinced that well-told stories extensively contribute to articulate and spread the excellence of a practice. They also constitute necessary and often refreshing counterpoints to more quantitative measurements such as economic efficiency, number of participants, and socio-professional data...

The Conceptual Basis

The conceptual basis for working with learning examples proceeds from Alasdair MacIntyre's idea of a practice¹²: "By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. Tic-tac-toe is not an example of a practice in this sense, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess. Bricklaying is not a practice; architecture is. Planting turnips is not a practice; farming is. So are the enquiries of physics, chemistry and biology, and so is the work of the historian, and so are painting and music."

RT's work can be considered a practice in the field of the performing arts, knowing that it is adapted by each local association according to specific contexts. A strength of the narrative approach using learning examples is that it has the capacity to make the excellences of RT's practices visible and accessible to reflection. This also means that there is no immediate need for further definition of a practice, excellence, or human flourishing, since all of these receive their characterization through the examples in question.

One distinction that does need to be made is between a practice and practical knowledge. A practitioner has practical knowledge in the sense that he or she has developed a capacity to engage skilfully with something through repeated practicing and the relevant experience (including study when necessary). This practical knowledge consists, in part, of a repertoire of cases from which a practitioner can draw when faced with similar circumstances¹³. Thus, an architect has a repertoire of buildings including the sites and process of construction, or a psychoanalyst has a repertoire of clinical cases. A craftsperson or farmer has a repertoire of workpieces or seasons from which to draw and a director or actor one of various performances. The point is that by documenting some of the cases from one's experience these become available as an expanded repertoire for others as well, and the learning examples often serve this purpose too. A practice is a shared context in which practical knowledge is enacted. Thus, the various practitioners at RT all have their individual practical knowledge, and this is enacted in the shared practice of the performing arts.

Finally, an important element is imagination. Most action requires some kind of imagination to proceed in any given situation. The learning examples documented at RT also help us expand on what our practice could be. Sometimes, this is the simplest but also the most difficult issue. We cannot just envision a different way of doing things until we encounter examples that suddenly open multiple doors.

¹² *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre, London: Bloomsbury, 2011

¹³ *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, D. Schön, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1987

Documenting Learning Examples: Some Practical Notes...

A learning example can be anything from a very short story about something that happened during the day to longer stories about processes stretching for weeks, months, or sometimes years. It can be written, filmed, or recorded during an interview... But a learning example should include some kind of initial contextualization, a detailed account of an event or way of doing things, and finally some kind of conclusion. One important aspect is that the narratives need to be about unusual, unexpected success or richness. In this methodological approach, average cases are avoided, and “extreme” or unusual cases preferred. Therefore, the methodology contributes to establish new norms that are not simply a confirmation of “business as usual” but that actively extend our perception towards possible new achievements. It questions applied norms and consensual experiences by actively searching and celebrating deviation – the “out-of-the-box”. Finally, by collecting several cases related to the same issue, but dealing with it in different ways, the approach promotes a pluralism of practices rather than a single “best practice” ideal.

A Learning Example

An association in Umeå, north of Sweden, realizing that they were not reaching certain target groups, decided to make a special effort to reach people who had never attended performing arts before. They had previously made similar efforts, but they did not yield any major results. They chose to hire a project manager and advertised for the position. Many applied with great experience in performing arts and project management. But as the goal was to work differently, they also tried to think differently. They ended up choosing a person who came from an area where they knew many members of the target audience lived. This person had an artistic and cultural background, had never worked directly with the performing arts, but clearly had the competencies required for the work including a great knowledge of the target group. After a while, the person built a referent group of about 15-20 people.

This group visited the theatre with a full explanation on how a theatre venue works. Things that may seem obvious are not so for those who have never been to a theatre before. Questions such as, “Where are the toilets? The wardrobes? The bar? What should I wear?” came up. The participants chose together what shows they wanted to attend and went together as a group. On the second occasion, the participants began to bring friends and family members, producing a ripple effect.

One participant talked about how a performance that was staging a love affair between two women became extremely important to address the subject of homosexuality that had never been discussed within her family. Both her mother and brother saw the performance, and afterwards, they could talk about the play. Participants also highlighted how important the group factor was. Even though they did not know each other from the beginning, they shared both a common background and the experience of attending and then discussing performances together. They were not left alone with their experience.

Some Comments to Conclude...

The above learning example shows how examples can work to expand and enrich one’s imagination regarding a specific issue, contributing to a practitioner’s practical knowledge. It illustrates what the association in Umeå considers to be excellence and helps their contribution flourish – the inclusion of new target groups in a meaningful way that goes beyond just recording their visits. The last part of the example also shows how such an approach cannot just be measured in quantity but that there is a qualitative aspect to it as well. Here, the association in Umeå effectively illustrates the values that they strive to enact through their practices and to share with others, thus opening a space for learning, critique (in case there isn’t a consensus regarding the excellence of an example), and, above all, celebration!

Graduated with a Master’s in Fine Arts from the Stockholm University of the Arts, Anusha Tyson is Director of Development at RT.

Ruhi Tyson is Associate Professor of Education at Stockholm University, as well as at the Waldorf University College. The published article draws in Ruhi Tyson’s *Educating for Vocational Excellence (International Handbook of Vocational Education and Training for the Changing World of Work*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2017) and *The Rough Ground. Narrative Explorations of Vocational Bildung and Wisdom in Practice* (PhD thesis, Stockholm University, Department of Education).



For My Negativity by and with Peter Kagayi © Jackson

THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN COLOGNE

A Self-Reflection Approach at a Regional Scale

As part of this process of transformation towards greater diversity, africologne (AFC), a small association with no permanent employees, decided to set up the *Good Practices Factory* as part of a process of self-reflection on its activities and positioning, as well as its operations and methodologies, in dialogue with other cultural institutions in the city and region.

STEPS TAKEN

The first step was to take stock of the festival, on and off stage. AFC is the only theatre festival in Germany entirely dedicated to African productions and held every two years in June in Cologne. Journalist and author Marie Yan was invited to take a critical look at the event. In her latest note, shared **p.27**, she concludes that while the AFC team certainly has good intentions, it remains locked into dated patterns. These texts will serve as a starting point for thinking about the next edition in 2025, the representativeness of the team that will run it, and the drafting of a code of conduct. The second stage was to set up a series of round tables and workshops, in collaboration with the heads of the City of Cologne's Diversity Office, as well as festival organizers, cultural operators, and artists at regional level, around the *Common Stories* theme of "Radicality: A Sustainable Transformation Towards Diversity?". The aim is to discuss how local strategies could be implemented within structures, in programming and with audiences, to better represent the cultural

diversity of the city today. The first meeting was held on February 5th, 2024 at the Orangerie Theatre in Cologne, and **p.26** we share some welcoming remarks put forward by Dr Sarah Youssef, the theatre's artistic director.

Lastly, the association is looking into new ways of cooperating and collaborating with existing artistic structures representing Afro-descendant communities and, more broadly, racialized people, at regional and national levels.

WHAT'S NEXT ?

A second round table was held on May 7th, 2024 in Cologne, moderated by Dr. Sarah Youssef, on the development of a handbook for diversity in our structures, teams and content. Two further meetings will take place in autumn 2024, with the aim of drafting a common code of conduct that can be adapted by each structure/partner.

Who?

The Good Practices Factory 2023 in Cologne was led by:

Gerhard Haag, Managing Director, AFC | **Kerstin Ortmeier**, Artistic Director, AFC | with: **Dr. Sarah Youssef**, Artistic Director, Orangerie Theatre | **Andrea Bleikamp**, WEHR51 | **Simon Eifeler**, Bridgeworks | **Janna Hüttebräucker**, Bridgeworks | **Ines Langel**, Orangerie Theatre | **Lisa Lehnen**, Overhead Project | **Laurenz Leky**, Theatre im Bauturm | **Bernd Schlenkrich**, Theatre im Bauturm | **Andrea Tedone**, Comedia Theatre

Where to Start?

by Dr. Sarah Youssef

On February 5th, 2024, the day began with a speech by Sarah Youssef, director of the Orangerie Theatre, host of the round table. Here we share a few passages from it...

The question is: Where do we begin? Or rather, where did we start? Intuitively, consciously, strategically, economically... When we talk about diversity, we have to look at what's happening on stage and behind the scenes, at the people and the content.

Traditionally, programs were designed with a specific audience in mind, often unintentionally excluding different perspectives. Radicality requires a paradigm shift. We need to rethink and transform our programs so that they are inherently inclusive and cover a wide range of contexts, experiences and points of view. [...]

Let's now turn to structure. The backbone of any organization, its structure, sets the tone for inclusiveness. Radicalism calls for the removal of barriers and hierarchies that hinder diversity. This means re-evaluating recruitment procedures, promotion criteria, and decision-making structures. It is about creating an environment in which talent and potential can flourish, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or other characteristics.

A diverse team is not just a box to tick, it's a strategic advantage. [...] It is not just about filling quotas. It is about drawing on a multitude of perspectives, ideas and experiences that foster innovation and creativity. This path requires not only the recruitment of diverse talents, but also the promotion of an inclusive culture that values differences and ensures that everyone has a place at the table.

In any organization, opportunities for participation are often the gateway to growth and influence. Radicalism demands that these opportunities be accessible to all and that the historical barriers that have limited certain groups are broken down. We need to actively seek out voices that have been marginalized and give them a platform.

Our audience is the final frontier of radicalism. It is not just about who attends our events or consumes our content. It is about ensuring that our message is received by a diverse and global audience. This means adapting our communication strategies so that they are culturally sensitive, linguistically inclusive, and representative of the world we live in. A radical approach to audiences encourages a sense of belonging and opens doors to communities that may have felt excluded in the past.

But, just as I'm not a fan of the term "radical", nor of the "sudden break", in my opinion, the road to radicality is not a sprint, but a marathon.

Transformation, a paradigm shift, requires commitment, introspection and a willingness to challenge the status quo. But the benefits are immense. Promoting diversity in programmes, structures, teams, participation opportunities, and audiences is not only ethical, it is also a proven catalyst for an organization's success.

africologne 2023: The Final Note Locked in an Outdated Vision

by Marie Yan

Invited by AFC to take a critical look at the 2023 edition, Marie Yan published a diary of her encounters and impressions during the festival. We are publishing extracts from her closing note.

Africologne came to an end two days ago, and I've moved to another place and another office. So, what remains of these ten days of festival, attending two or three events a day, walking around Cologne, chatting with artists, organizers and the public?

Alas, once the emotion of the great performances I saw had passed, the tiredness of the first day came back to me. The festival left me with the impression of an event struggling to move towards the new metaphors and archetypes that writer Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor called for in her opening speech. I could still feel, in the interstices of an unquestioned curatorial approach, yet founded on long and sincere relationships between the festival and its guest artists, a universalism that has lost its candour in the crime of colonization. A universalism that too quickly says "We are all equal", in the same way that one awkwardly leaves a conversation that has just begun in the courts of history.

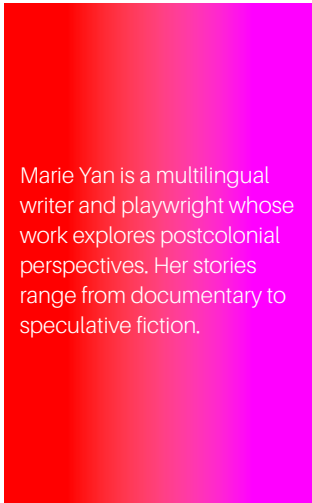
In this, it echoes the opening of the African Futures All Around programme, in which many - white - officials spoke of dialogue and exchange, questioning the conditions of this dialogue and exchange, when [...] fifteen guests, students and teachers were refused visas for Germany? The same happened at AFC, where three participants were missing: artist and activist Hyppolite Ntigurirwa [...] and [...] Ugandan musicians Collin Serunjogi and Mudhasi Jaffer. Their absence creates a definite chasm in the futures evoked at these events.

This final article could be a call for change, but it isn't, because that's not for me to do. It's up to those who are involved, from far

and near. But if there is to be change, allow me to digress: In *For My Negativity*¹⁴, a voice celebrates Uganda's independence by proclaiming: 'Let's keep the best of British administration'. In 1922, in another British colony, Hong Kong, the administration adopted the Emergency Regulations Ordinance: whatever regulations it wanted to adopt, it could now do so in the blink of an eye. Very handy for suppressing freedoms, in times of strikes in the city's ports. The ordinance remained in law. It was used again during the 1967 demonstrations against freedom of expression and assembly. Then the British left, but the law remained in force. In 2019, it is being used again, against pro-democracy demonstrations.

During the festival, I asked some of the artists and participants how they saw the future. [...] Mireille Fanon Mendès-France replied: "Dark. It's heading for chaos. If we do nothing." Another response came in the form of a question, in reaction to the African Futures All Around programme launched by the city of Cologne: "Is it up to Germany to decide the future of Africa? Should the future of Africa be decided in Germany?"

[...] To africologne, which has welcomed me, I too say sorry for my negativism, but too much of the future has already been sacrificed because of "unspoken intentions / trapped in outdated visions"¹⁵.



Marie Yan is a multilingual writer and playwright whose work explores postcolonial perspectives. Her stories range from documentary to speculative fiction.

"What a time we live in! Of existential and spectacular battles. Over worldviews and methodologies. What a mess. What an opportunity. This season of change sees the reluctant withdrawal of the old powers from our world. Uncertainty and collapse — when established systems and structures give way, no longer able to house or contain our humanity in its complex realities, in the emergence of its multiple possibilities. [...] This is a season for new metaphors and new archetypes."

Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, Cologne, June 2023

¹⁴ Performance by Ugandan poet Kagayi Ngobi presented as part of africologne 2023

¹⁵ *For My Negativity*, Kagayi Ngobi, Kitara Nation, 2019



Workshop from Lato project © Aleksandra Rogalska

THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN WARSAW

Making Theatre Accessible to All

TR Warszawa (TRW) has been recognized for several years for its involvement in accessibility issues. It won the Leader of Accessibility award from the Culture Without Barriers Foundation for its implementation of innovative accessibility practices in its educational activities. During the confinement period, we expanded our accessibility practices with an ambitious streaming programme. Therefore we have chosen to approach this notion of radicalism through the prism of our accessibility policy.

RADICALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

So, what does it mean to be radical when developing access strategies within an arts institution?

In 2023, major private funding enabled TRW to present two or three shows every fortnight, with a sign language interpreter and a screen for subtitles.

However, we quickly realized that accessibility is often perceived as an extra burden, both by the host teams and by the company and/or guest artists, adding to the work already required to produce and present a show. We have sensed the reluctance of some artists to incorporate accessibility tools into their production for aesthetic, conceptual, or technical reasons.

We thus set up an internal think-tank, bringing together the executive producers, assistant directors, stage managers, the video department, and the technical director. We concluded that the only way to get the guest artists to take accessibility into account in their productions was to make it an essential part of the production contract. We therefore introduced an accessibility clause. The artistic team must now take into account the presence of accessibility tools/supports in the creative process – a screen for subtitles, the presence on stage of a sign language interpreter. Taking this into account upstream in the creative process means that potential conflicts can be anticipated – to avoid, for example, the light from the subtitle screen interfering with possible moments of total darkness on the stage, or video slots conflicting with the physical presence of the interpreter... Throughout the process, our technical teams propose scenographic solutions to the artist, enabling the work to develop organically around these elements.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Pursuing our efforts to make theatre more accessible to people with special needs, we are developing our first project with a deaf artist, Adam Stoyanov. Rehearsals will begin in June 2024, with a premiere scheduled for September. This process will enable the whole team to continue training and thinking together to propose new tools or protocols to make our theatre more accessible.

TRW will also promote a “barrier-free” brand image and marketing. An initial series of invitations to performances in sign language have already been produced...

Who?

The Good Practices Factory 2024 in Warsaw was led by:

Agata Kolacz, Head of International Projects, TRW | **Helena Świągocka**, Project Manager, accessibility department, TRW | And other members of the Accessibility, Technical and Production teams at TRW

A CONVERSATION WITH...

Adam Stoyanov

In 2024, TRW is writing a new chapter by opening up the institution to creations by artists with disabilities. It will co-produce and host the premiere of *EP*, a performance co-created by deaf poet and performer Adam Stoyanov, TRW ensemble actress Monika Frajczyk and director Agnieszka Jakimiak. The play will be performed in Polish Sign Language and translated into spoken language. Helena Świegocka, in charge of Accessibility at TRW, spoke to Adam Stoyanov.

Like TRW, a growing number of institutions and theatres are opening their doors to deaf artists and other artists with disabilities. What do you think of these increasingly numerous collaborations?

Adam Stoyanov (AS): I'm happy to see hearing people invite deaf artists to perform, but personally, I think there's still a long way to go. As a deaf artist, I don't attract as much attention as others. The public doesn't know about us. People may know that some theatres provide oral translations of shows in sign language, but they are rarely enthusiastic enough to come and see them. Yet, it's important for hearing people to understand deaf artists and their work. You don't need to be able to sign, and it's perfectly possible to follow our work through an interpreter.

Few people really want to immerse themselves in pieces created by deaf artists; most still regard them as a curiosity. Do you think that collaborations like the one with TRW will help change things?

AS: Collaborations like this show that deaf artists should be treated equally. Not only are these collaborations different and exciting, but they show just how creative deaf people can be. They just need to be given a chance. It's worth showing that we're not so different, that we're all equal and can easily work together, without any shame or stereotypes associated with deafness — stereotypes that I want to take apart. I'd like not only to work with hearing people, but also to show them that there's nothing to be afraid of, and that there are many ways of communicating, including gestures, and that sign language is worth learning. I know it's not the easiest language, but fluency always comes with time. If hearing people learn the basics, or

even just one sign, such as "Hello", "Thank you" or "Goodbye", it radically changes the connection. It shows deaf or hard-of-hearing people that we care about them.

Are institutions afraid that this will be too difficult? Indeed, if a theatre invites me to see a play in Spanish, they'll offer me a Polish translation, with surtitles. I wouldn't expect the play to be too difficult to understand... Plays by deaf artists should be approached in the same way, it seems to me that it's a very similar experience.

AS: What's certain is that I wouldn't be able to create a complete production from start to finish: I don't speak Polish, so I'd have to collaborate with hearing people. What's more, I've never studied art. Some people say you have to go to university, and that a degree is proof of your abilities, giving you the right to work. But I don't know enough Polish to study and get a degree. I'm convinced, however, that you don't need to physically speak. You can sign and work with an interpreter. It doesn't matter whether you're deaf or hearing, and it doesn't matter what school you've attended. The only thing you need is talent and skill!

In *EP*, you will be accompanied by a cellist and a sound environment. What do you expect from this dialogue between signed language and music?

AS: The possibilities are endless. It's going to help me — I don't know — to transform myself completely on stage and explore other states of mind! I don't know yet what will come out of it. I can only tell you that anything could happen!

Interview by **Helena Świegocka**, April 2024

To Watch!

[Watch the full interview in Polish Signed language.](#)



© Piotr Kruszak

Born deaf, Adam Stoyanov was raised in a deaf family. The Polish Sign Language (PJM) is therefore his native language. Artist, he is known for his sign poetry and other deaf language arts (e.g. Visual Vernacular). Performer and author, he has participated in a number of plays including *Jeden gest* (One Gesture) directed by Wojtek Ziemilski, *Opera dla Głuchych* (Opera for the Deaf) directed by Wojtek Zrałka-Kossakowski, *Rytuał miłosny* (Love Ritual) directed by Daniel Kotowski. Stoyanov was awarded the First Prize and the Audience Award at the Festival of Signed Poetry (2016) and the Gazeta Wyborcza WARTO 2022 Award in Wrocław. His signed poems are available at: www.psg.warszawa.pl

(RE)SOURCES

Each GPF group sent about ten references of books, articles, films, podcasts that have been nurturing their reflections over the past few months... This is not an exhaustive list, but rather a bedside, heartfelt bibliography: words, thoughts, images from which to build, expand, face doubts too, but always move forward...

PICK OF THE MC93

To Read

L'Opposé de la blancheur. Réflexions sur le problème blanc, Léonora Miano, Éditions du Seuil, 2023

Self-Defense, A Philosophy of Violence (Se défendre. Une philosophie de la violence), Elsa Dorlin, Verso, 2022

Rester barbare, Louise Yousfi, Éditions La Fabrique, 2022

Out of the Dark Night. Essays on Decolonization, Achille Mbembe, Columbia University Press, 2021

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous, Ocean Vuong, Penguin Press, 2019

Décolonisons les arts !, under the direction of Leïla Cukierman, Gerty Dambury and Françoise Vergès, L'Arche, 2018

Going to Meet the Man, James Baldwin, Penguin Books, 2013

The Fire Next Time, James Baldwin, Penguin Books, 2006

La matrice de la race. Généalogie sexuelle et coloniale de la nation française, Elsa Dorlin, Éditions La Découverte, 2006

To Watch

Ouvrir la Voix, Amandine Gay, Bras de Fer, 2017

I Am Not Your Negro, Raoul Peck, Velvet Film, 2016

Édouard Glissant, One World in Relation, Manthia Diawara, K'a Yéléma Productions, 2010

PICK OF THE THÉÂTRE NATIONAL WALLONIE-BRUXELLES

To Read

Les transidentités expliquées à mes parents (et à tous les autres), Victoria Defraigne, Éditions Mardaga, 2023

Les grandes oubliées: Pourquoi l'histoire a effacé les femmes, Titiou Lecoq, Collection Proche, 2023

Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race, Reni Eddo-Lodge, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017

We Should All Be Feminists, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Fourth Estate Ltd, 2014

La Diversité, Michel Wieviorka, Éditions Robert Laffont, 2012

The Wretched of the Earth (Les damnés de la Terre), Frantz Fanon, Penguin Classics, 2001

To Watch

L'Arabe dans le poste, Azzeddine Ahmed-Chaouch and Youcef Khemane, TF1 Production, 2023

Exterminate All the Brutes (Exterminez toutes ces brutes), Raoul Peck, Arte Editions, 2022

Mariannes Noires, Mame-Fatou Niang and Kaytie Nielsen, 2016

PICK OF CULTURGEST

To Read

Decolonizar o Museu - Programa de Desordem Absoluta (Programme de désordre absolu – Décoloniser le musée), Françoise Vergès, Orfeu Negro, 2024

Tribuna Negra: Origens do Movimento Negro em Portugal 1911-1933, Cristina Roldão, Pedro Varela and José Pereira, Tinta da China, 2023

Memórias da Plantação: Episódios de Racismo Quotidiano, Grada Kilomba, Orfeu Negro, 2022

A Cena da Pós-Memória - O Presente do Passado na Europa Pós-Colonial, António Sousa Ribeiro, Edições Afrontamento, 2021

Not Just a Mirror – Looking for the Political Theatre Today, Malzacher Florian, A House on Fire Publication, 2015

La désobéissance épistémique - Rhétorique de la modernité, logique de la colonialité et grammaire de la décolonialité, Walter Mignolo, Peter Lang Editions, 2015

Histórias mestiças – Antologia de textos, Adriano Pedrosa and Lilia Moritz, Editora Cóbogó, 2014

PICK OF THE RIKSTEATERN

To Read

Minoritetsstress I praktiken, Hanna Wallensteen and Isatou Svenungsson, Vidga Normen, 2021

A Brief History of the Masses - Three Revolutions, Stefan Jonsson, Columbia University Press, 2008

Prejudice, Social Stress, and Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations: Conceptual Issues and Research Evidence, Ilan H. Meyer, Psychol Bull, 2003

Equality in And Still I Rise, Maya Angelou, Random House, 1978

To Watch

Seven Methods of Killing Kylie Jenner, Jasmine Lee-Jones, The Royal Court Theatre production, 2023

PICK OF AFRICOLOGNE

To Read

Sozialer Wandel und Kohäsionsforschung. Diversität und Diskriminierung. Analysen und Konzepte, Mina Mittertrainer, Kerstin Oldemeier and Barbara Thiessen, Springer VS, 2023

Kultur: Wandel – Impulse für eine zukunftsweisende Kulturpraxis, Anna Bläich, Felix Grädler, Henning Mohr and Hannes Seibold, transcript, 2023

Inklusion, Diversität und Heterogenität. Begriffsverwendung und Praxisbeispiele aus multidisziplinärer Perspektive, Nicola Hericks, Springer VS, 2021

Nicht mein Antirassismus. Warum wir einander zuhören sollten, statt uns gegenseitig den Mund zu verbieten. Eine Ermutigung, Canan Topcu, Quadriga, 2021

Diversität und Diversitätsmanagement, Regine Bendl, Edeltraud Hanappi-Egger and Roswitha Hofmann, UTB, 2012

PICK OF THE TR WARSZAWA

To Read

Teksty Drugie. Teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja - Bimonthly journal of literary studies published by the Institute for Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, in cooperation with the Pro Cultura Litteraria association, Studies on Disability, 2020

Nie przywitam się z państwem na ulicy. Szkic o doświadczeniu niepełnosprawności, Maria Reimann, Czarne, 2019

Niepełnosprawność i społeczeństwo. Performatywna siła protestu, Ewelina Godlewska-Byliniak and Justyna Lipko-Konieczna, Teatr 21, 2018

Odzyskiwanie obecności. Niepełnosprawność w teatrze i performansie, Ewelina Godlewska-Byliniak and Justyna Lipko-Konieczna, Teatr 21, 2017

21 myśli o teatrze, Ewelina Godlewska-Byliniak and Justyna Lipko-Konieczna, Teatr 21, Fundacja Win-Win, 2015

Staring: How We Look, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Oxford University Press, 2009

Extraordinary Bodies Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Columbia University Press, 1996

Enforcing Normalcy. Disability, Deafness and the Body, Lennard J. Davis, Verso, 1995

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