

DIVERSE
BODY/IES

DIVERSE BODY/IES IN CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS AND OUTDOOR ARTS



ARTCENA

ARTCENA is the National Center for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts, supported by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates Circostrada and is a permanent member of its steering committee. It works in close collaboration with professionals in the sector and offers them both publications and digital resources via its web platform. It also develops mentoring and training actions, tools and services to help them in their everyday practices. It supports contemporary creation through national support programs and encourages the international development of these three sectors.



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This publication
was edited
by Circostrada

CIRCO
STRADA

EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR
CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS
AND OUTDOOR ARTS

Circostrada is the European Network for contemporary circus and outdoor arts. Created in 2003 with the core mission of furthering the development, empowerment and recognition of these fields at European and international levels, over the years the network has become an important anchoring point for its members – 153 organisations from over 42 countries – and a key interlocutor in the dialogue with cultural policy makers across Europe.

ABOUT CIRCOSTRADA AND ARTCENA

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In a few words, Circostrada is:

- A community of contemporary circus and outdoor arts professionals linked together by common values and aspirations, who advocate for greater recognition and more structured cultural policies.
- The voice and reference network of contemporary circus and outdoor arts in Europe.
- A group of passionate and committed individuals who meet several times a year at the network's events.
- A network dedicated to its members, engaged in facilitating the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and good practices at European and international levels.
- A digital resource platform that provides thematic publications, observation tools and news on contemporary circus and outdoor arts, available to all free of charge in English and French.

🌐 www.circostrada.org

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THEMATIC FOREWORD

Diverse Body/ies is the thematic focus of Circostrada's activities that took place between September 2022 and August 2023, which sought and contributed to "explore, promote, and adopt more socially inclusive frameworks and practices".

The authors of the following articles were either suggested by the Circostrada members who co-organised activities during the Diverse Body/ies thematic (Bússola in the frame of LEME Festival, Paisaje Público in collaboration with Cielos del infinito and Santiago a Mil, ROOM100, Cirkorama and Cirkusfera in the frame of Peculiar Families Festival, Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde in collaboration with the 2023 Eleusis European Capital of Culture), by the participants of the different activities, or by the members of the Diverse body/ies internal committee. In addition, a special attention was placed on artists and projects supported by ARTCENA, circusnext, IN SITU, and Perform Europe (the last three initiatives being co-funded by the European Union).

With this publication, we aimed to give space to a multiplicity of voices and share some food for thought, while also summing up a part of the discussions held during the Diverse body/ies activities.

Needless to say, we are aware that the "questions of fairness, equity, equality, inclusion, diversity, and accessibility and possibilities of better practices" are broad and extensive, which is why this publication does not pretend to be an exhaustive source of information (nor inspiration, or maybe just a bit) on the topics around the Diverse body/ies. Lastly, although we are mindful of the limitations set by this year's network activities geography – i.e. Portugal, Chile, Croatia, and Greece – we believe it was coherent with our mission statement on bringing extra value to stories based in the countries where this year's co-organising members are based.

Finally, this publication contains as well the "Circostrada Charter for Diversity", which is the result of a nearly year-long collective process between members of the Diverse Body/ies internal committee, Circostrada coordination team, and external experts working around questions of inclusivity, fairness, equity, and accessibility in the arts.

We hope you enjoy and continue the reflection around the Diverse body/ies thematics through this publication. For more information about the general red thread of CS BODY/IES – Circostrada's latest project – and yearly thematic focuses, we suggest you to check this page or to get in touch with us by email at infocircostrada@artcena.fr.

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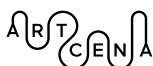


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FOOD FOR THOUGHTS: THE DIVERSE BODY/IES IN PERFORMING ARTS

BODIES FULL OF OTHER BODIES

An article by Cheril Linett



Cheril Linett is a Chilean performance artist and stage director, graduate in Theatre with a major in Performance (Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano). She is the author of the performance project *Yeguada Latinoamericana*. She began her artistic work in 2015, participating in meetings, festivals and, mainly, performing independently in public spaces. To date, she has created and directed numerous works, grouped in performance series such as *Coreografía de la Succión*, *Poética de las Aguas*, *Vertiente Fúnebre* and *Casa*. She published the books *Yeguada Latinoamericana de Cheril Linett* (Trío Editorial, 2021) and *Anarcografías del Cuerpo* (Trío Editorial, 2021), which compile photographs and texts about her works. She has participated in group exhibitions in Chile and Germany, and in artistic residencies in Argentina and Spain. Recently, she had her first solo exhibition, entitled *Del cuerpo a la carne* (Museo C.A.V. La Neomudéjar, Madrid, Spain), and directed the play *Volver al lugar donde asesinaron a mi madre*, written by Carla Zuñiga.

“Diversitas” is the etymological root of “diversity”, and it refers to both human beings and other organisms which are multiple and varied, different and singular. There are several types of diversities. This word is used for things, opinions, animals or people. The concept that can refer to aspects of humanity such as race, class, biology, culture, linguistics, ability, sexuality, religion, opinions or ideologies. However, it is one thing to perceive its existence and another to develop the ethical and interpersonal skills required to understand it, both in society and in all living beings that cohabit our planet. We do not exist without others and there is not just one way of existing, but a multiplicity of forms of life, each one complex in itself. I prefer ways of life that move away from standardised patterns, because, on a social level, life and all its stages have typically been understood in relation to convention.



Cheril Linett, *Coreografía de la Succión IV*. Santiago, Chile. Junio de 2016. Credits: Clo Rouge

Performance is also diverse. Defining the term “performance” is complicated because its semantics are broad. It is used in a variety of ways, but I am inte-

rested in analysing it as an artistic practice, language or means of expression. Although there is no formal or official definition of performance because it

can be done in multiple ways and its exponents are themselves diverse, certain key concepts or characterising elements have emerged as I have written about my practice.

I am fascinated by performance because it runs counter to its nature to pigeonhole it into one discipline. It is an embodied, anarchic and interdisciplinary practice that stands on the margins of institutions and against the cultural apparatuses that have tried to mould it, breaking through the limits of art. Being interdisciplinary by nature, it is made up of knowledge, skills and elements learned by artists, which are used to shape action. We can agree on some practice-related elements that will help us grasp an approximation of the concept, but each artist carries his or her own tools and knowledge that make his or her practice unique.

The central element of any performance is the use of the body - its living presence - as a basis. That is to say, the performer occupies his or her body as a material on stage, since it is physicality which brings the human experience to life. Our bodies are our archive, our memory, an evocative medium, our vital space and a space of happenings and confrontation.

“The body is in itself the place and space of the image, and its representation in a performance space goes beyond the limitations of re-presentation” (Borges de Barros, 2011, p. 27).

Another important aspect of performance is its spatiality. In this regard, the researcher Amilcar Borges de Barros makes a distinction between the concepts of space and place, viewing the former term as:

“a site of occupation, enunciation, positioning, expansion, organisation, presentation and optical/haptic

agency, and space as a fissure, route and point of escape/ blindness that evades us and is reified, displaced and multiplied by encounters, context, perceptions and interpretations between observer and the observed” (Borges de Barros, 2011, p. 22).

Thanks to Borges, I was able to understand the body as a space incarnate and as a place, with sound as another space, and visibility taking precedence over orality and the use of words. The limits of representation and presentation are blurred in a performance, generating confusion in the spectators, an issue that draws my attention when it happens because it opens the way for different readings and interpretations.

During the performance, an active relationship is established in the present moment between the environment, the other performers (in the case of an ensemble or collective performance), the spectator and the stage event. In my case, images emerge as a kind of sketch and form a diagram or structure, but always with an openness to new images emerging during execution.

Personally, conventional venues such as theatres, art centres, museums or galleries don't make sense to me as performance spaces. I prefer spaces where a sense of dislocation is generated, spaces where such events are not expected, and unconventional places where a tension occurs between what a place represents, the memory it holds and the action. In this way, it revives political, socio-cultural and critical positions or re-situates the spectators' gaze and interpretations when confronted with a specific event, subjects or places that represent order, control and repression. The spaces where, in my opinion, performances should take place are institutional sites, sites which hold memories, streets, homes or even out in nature, for example. The choice of place is part of the thinking process behind the action, bearing in mind the differences between spaces and places. The choice should not be random. In my practice, this decision has become a fundamental part of the diagramming and sketching process that forms into an action on the basis of an image, and then unfolds into even more image-compositions planned or created in the moment.



Cheril Linett, *Virgen del Carmen Bella*. Yeguada Latinoamericana. Santiago, Chile. Septiembre de 2019. Credits: Gi Del Río

Rhythm and temporality are non-material and essential components that can vary, and it is important to be aware of how they are being used. In terms of time, an action can be fleeting, brief or durational. The moment when the event occurs is the here and now. That is why it is said that performance is ephemeral, but this does not mean that it cannot exist over time through audiovisual recordings and photographs. An important part of the processes behind a work and its creation is recording live performance and, in the case of audiovisual material, editing. An artist can generate his or her own archive through recordings.

In this practice, the creative process, exploration and research are the priority, as opposed to results alone. No single piece is a result in itself; instead, each one is part of a larger research process. In my case, I focus on looking for new possibilities that will enable me to manipulate the materialities I choose, the potential readings and the compositions of images which emerge from the different uses I give them. The process will culminate when the artist dies or when he or she decides to stop or can no longer continue to create.

Actions can be carried out individually or collectively or be picked up and continued by bystanders. I consider myself a performance director, an unusual role that does not usually exist in my language (Spanish). Thanks to the performing arts tools I bring, I have been able to discover a methodology that allows me to direct from within the performance and become the chorus of a choir. The number of performers varies according to each work's requirements. The leader of this chorus – me, in this case – should not be identified, according to this premise.

The performance's audience is as multiple and diverse as each person. It can be an audience close to the performer which is attending with the express purpose of seeing the action, com-



Cheril Linett, *Mudarse. Poetica de las Aguas III*. Curanipe, Chile. Febrero de 2021. Credits: Gi Del Río

panions who are accomplices by dint of their containment in the space, or strangers who happen to pass through the space where the work takes place. It is mainly this last category of viewers that I am thinking of. Performing in public space is the most effective way of appealing to a wide audience and establishing an equal relationship between co-subjects (that is to say, between performers and passers-by). It requires this shared presence to turn the aesthetic experience into a social event, triggering a transformation not only in the person who enacts it, but also in the person who witnesses it.

The concept of liminality is relevant here. This concept does not come from art theory, aesthetics or philosophy, but from anthropological studies of rituals (Fischer-Lichte, 2014). In his book *The Rites of Passage*, French folklorist and ethnographer Arnold van Gennep (2008) writes that there are three phases of ritual: separation, transition (or limen) and reintegration. Building on van Gennep's research, the Scottish anthropologist Victor Turner (1988) devised the concept of liminality as a threshold space, a suspended, interstitial state that the individual experiences when undergoing a rite of passage. This transformation implies the passage from

one level to another and moving towards a new state, one different and distant from that which came before. Performance scholar and theorist Richard Schechner (2010) agrees with Turner's thinking: for both writers, performance produces liminality. In other words, the liminality born out of ritual can be extrapolated to performance art by generating an interstitial space between the performer and his or her audience.

Another point of view is proposed by Taylor, for whom "performances operate as vital acts of transfer, conveying social knowledge, memory and a sense of identity through repeated actions" (Taylor, 2011, p. 34). In this sense, ritual's transformative quality as outlined by Turner (1988) and Schechner (2010) is adapted from the perspective of memory and the transfer of social knowledge which the performer shares with the audience through the work or action, starting from that interstitial space which envelops them both.

The word "performance" is of English origin, so it is foreign to Latin Americans. Taylor (2011) points out that, from a Latin American perspective, the term "performance" bespeaks a new colonialism because it has no translation into Spanish or Portuguese, and it is

not used by all artists to refer to their work. Despite this, it appears in lots of different contexts, as it “has traditionally been used in the arts especially to refer to performance art, live art and action art” (Taylor, 2011, p. 35).

I would like to point out the transvestism of the word “performance” in my language. The artist, the person who studies the art or the person who witnesses it can use the word as either a masculine or feminine noun in Spanish. I decided to refer to it as *la performance* (the feminine form). Given that the gendered language of Spanish is the one that allows me to communicate, it is relevant and unavoidable for me to think about the gender or sex of the concept and its practice. This exercise can be extrapolated to offer a way of rethinking and problematising race, class, churches, the nation state, marital and migration status, and resisting and confronting all power’s institutions. This enables it to generate resonances and gain local strength, as it emerges in situ.

Initially, my invitations and projects were made up of cis women (cis being a term for people whose gender identity matches their assigned gender at birth). Cis is a Latin prefix meaning “on this side”, so that which is on the other

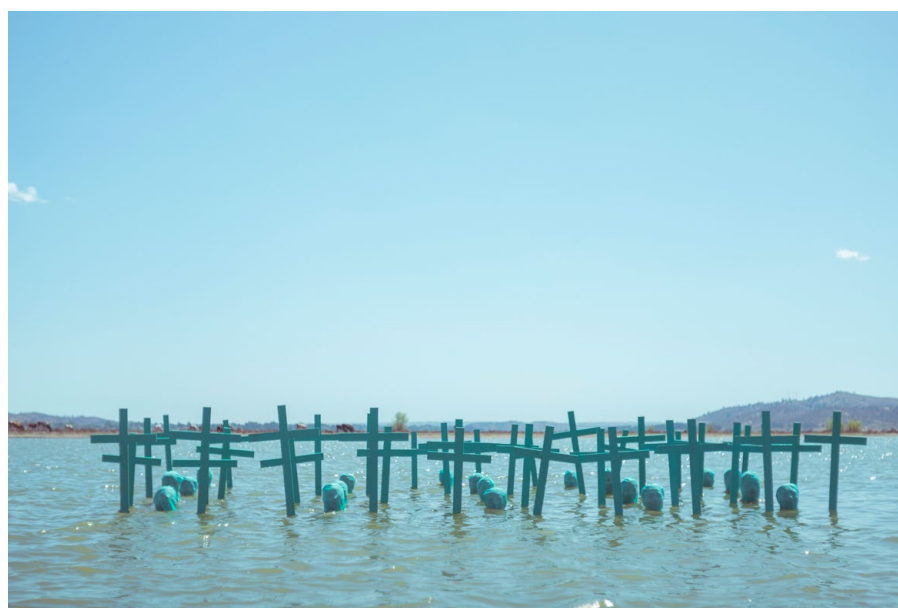
side is “trans”. Cis women are born with a vulva and who, since birth, have inhabited the world as women and have reaffirmed their status as such. As I began to question the heterosexual and binary regime under which humans are socially conceptualised, it became important and urgent for me to broaden the invitation to encourage articulations with sex-gender dissidences. To reject the heteronormative and heterosexual conventions by which reality is understood and ordered, I included trans people, sex workers, transvestites, drag artists and non-binary people into my performances. Together, we recognised ourselves as the opposite of submissive, as agitators who confront the historical construction that the white, heterosexual, cis-gendered male has established over us.

The singularities of each person in my work teams in terms of gender identity, “race”, physical particularities and abilities are of great relevance. In this regard, in neither my artistic work nor my daily life do I leave an opening for those to whom I have no ideological, political or class-based affinity. I have decided to use the term “sexual dissidence” to refer to the community that I have felt part of since I was a teenager, when I recognised myself as a non-heterosexual person, because I am aware of

our historical burden of discrimination and violence, as well as the memories of struggle and offence in the face of those who seek to victimise us, the wider public and repressive institutions. On the contrary, “sexual diversity” is a term that I do not use because it is exclusionary, constructing a distance and a margin. It has been co-opted by the neoliberal system to single out people who are other, non-heterosexuals or those who reject gender binarism, neutralising its political potential.

Going back to my practice, I think it is difficult to separate it from everyday life. Life and creative works are intertwined, they exist in and of each other. In terms of sexuality - a frequent theme in my work - I strongly defend sexual and reproductive rights and our continual mutation and fluidity. I am fascinated to think of an anarchic eroticism that resists the one inherited by hegemonic cis-normativity, in which heterosexuality is obligatory and all those who do not follow the mandate must be tolerated from the point of view of liberal spaces and institutions. In life and work, I propose that we live our desires in an autonomous way, that we be unclassifiable, each one with their own tastes, fetishes, pleasures and specific needs. Modes and individuals are diverse, just as every life is diverse. I like to think that each person has specific desires and that these can become a centre of political affirmation and a unique and singular social identity. In creative works, this affirmation and place of political enunciation which is the body itself makes meaning, stimulating potential interpretations and the construction of a discourse.

Discourses are articulated according to socio-political contexts. Any social transformation has a radical impact on artistic practice, as one is inherent to the other. Therefore, each of the people and all the memories that their bodies carry are part of the work and, when recorded on camera, become a historical, cultural, political and social archive, rather than a mere artistic show.



Cheril Linett, Memorial. Poetica de las Aguas II. Lago Rapel, Chile. 2020. Credits: Gi Del Río

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Special thanks to sociologist and performer Ivón Figueroa Taucán for editing this text.



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Dear impostor syndrome,

Are we together on this? We share some fears, of disappointment, appropriation, exposition, ridicule, and mockery. These fears come with arrogance. As if there was a pedestal from which to fall. But what if there is not such a pedestal? What if we - you and me, impostor syndrome - remember humility?

I write from a white, abled, kind of normative-skinny-tonic body. I also write from a transgender and old - compared to the standards of circus stages - body. Just to speak body. I am visualising Fabrizio Giannini literally coming out of a wooden closet in the show CAPAS¹. Do I have to eternally come out of closets? And, as Kosofsky² and Butler³ suggested, I don't mean it as if there was a binary closet where to either be in or out, I am thinking more of a Schrödinger's closet, where to simultaneously be in and out⁴.

Impostor syndrome, no one writes alone, it's OK if you want to join⁵.

Dear past me,

In 2004, you went for the first time to rue de la Folie Méricourt 68, to visit the library of HorsLesMurs⁶. Because when circus entered in your life it got stuck and, studying philosophy, you changed your master topic - from quantum physics or AI - to circus.

Nineteen years have passed since. To speak about (my) age in circus, is to get out of a closet. And probably if I can do it now, it is from the privilege of being a creator/dramaturg/author/director, who decides which bodies to put on stage. It is not the same situation when you are an interpreter, and you need to be picked among other [(young(er))] interpreters. You may (need to) stay in the closet. The body performing something else than the heroic power of youth is a big taboo in circus. Although there is also the other extreme, when being visibly old is welcomed, as an inspiration, an invitation for the audience to think that someone is "good for their age".

Another expression of inspiration porn⁷.

There is the need of belonging and the fear of appropriating spaces. Some time ago, for years, you collaborated in the organisation of a trans cabaret. And each year you would ask yourself if you were "trans enough" to be there.

My pronouns are they/he in English, and often he/him in other languages. My body is actively receiving synthetic hormones. My body is changing. My body doesn't fit in the two changing rooms of the swimming pool where I train apnea. My body doesn't fit in most (circus) stages. I (try to) generate spaces where to welcome transformation and in-betweenness. And I have (the privilege of) passing⁸: I do pass as young(er) and - with some trick - I can pass as both the official (cis)genders (or maybe not?).

Dear past me, I remember when you were (trying to be) a trapezist. A swinging trapeze artist in Montreal. Montreal was the factory of swinging trapeze ar-

¹ Compañía de circo "eia", show CAPAS (2011-2015)
² Kosofsky Sedwick Eve, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990)
³ Butler Judith, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" in *The Lesbian and Gay Study Reader* (1993)
⁴ The Schrödinger's cat is a famous thought experiment by Nobel Prize - and sexual abuser - Erwin Schrödinger. It proposes to imagine that a cat in a box could simultaneously be alive and dead until it is observed. The thought experiment was meant to criticise the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, by showing the paradox of a theory that thinks that a system exists in a superposition of states until it is observed.
⁵ Special thanks to Jose, Valentina, and Tay for reading a first draft of this text.
⁶ HorsLesMurs was the (French) National Centre for Circus and Street Arts until 2016, when, merging with the (French) National Centre of Theatre, it became ARTCENA.
⁷ The expression "Inspiration Porn" was coined in 2012 by disability rights activist Stella Young. It refers to the objectification of one group of people (the disabled) for the purpose of making them an inspiration to another group (the abled). It uses messages such as "If a disabled person can do it, you - abled - for sure can". The expression has later been extended to other discriminated groups.
⁸ "Passing" refers to being perceived as a gender you identify with, and you were not assigned at birth. It can also occasionally refer to being perceived as a gender it is safer to perform (compared to being perceived as transgender). And, by extension, I am using the word here referring to gender and age.

tists that would go to Cirque du Soleil and other modern circuses. Some of them would (need to) lie about their age. Age was a shame, an inconvenience. You listened to things such as “I will be the best trapezist in the world” and you felt like an alien. You were an alien. This circus world around you wanted to be the best. As in Ringling Bros and Barnum & Baileys, it wanted to play in the central ring. To play in the central ring, there was only one body welcomed. It was white, abled, skinny, young, and - if swinging on a trapeze - feminine. You were told that if you wanted to do swinging trapeze, you had to have long hair and put on a dress. You wore a wig. You weren't completely aware of it, but now I tell you, you were doing drag! You were a trapeze drag-queen. I remember a conversation with a programmer. You proposed a creative act. Silence. You added a second option, more as an experiment: “I also have an act of a woman with long hair and a red dress”. He said “Yes, I'd like that”.

Anyway, swinging trapeze gave you the adrenaline you needed to reconnect with your body, to resituate from a physicality, to feel matter. The air grounded you. So, dear past me, that's fine.

Dear privilege,

In 2016 we, you and I, invited blind dancer Joan Casaoliva to a residency. He (contra)proposed that we first get to know each other “in a place that you don't know, and I know”, where I – sighted – would enter and leave blindfolded.

I was starting the research project *A(h)! NO, rmalidades*, which was intended to explore some alterations in the abilities of senses and mobility. It was composed of three independent residencies. The first one was around sight⁹. I covered my eyes for seven days, twenty-four hours a day. Several people accompanied the process,



EZ by Elena Zanzu © Mila Ercoli

being an “external vision” next to my “internal vision” and taking care of a safe(r) space where to take risks¹⁰. I was interested in the movements that this investigation would generate in me, in the invited collaborators and in the people that, intentionally or unintentionally, I would meet during the week.

When the residency started, I quickly realised that everything that I had not previously prepared, would need to be done differently. Sharing a look, suddenly, for a week, ceased to be accessible. I had to rely on other forms of communication. Communicating with me required extra effort on everyone's part, not only on me, and often people would react avoiding me. For example, one day I was doing some practice in the residency space, closed door, when an external person entered. I did not notice him, and he did not try to communicate his presence to me. He just stayed for a while, unnoticed. He did not hide; he simply didn't make the extra effort needed to communicate his presence and ask if he could stay. Another day, while I was walking down the street with Tiziana, a person recognised me, looked at her

with a questioning mark, and then left without disclosing his presence to me. Often people talked about me to other people, even though I was present. For example, they would ask “how are they?” instead of saying “how are you?”. Since I couldn't see people, people pretended not to see me.

One day, I had clear images of what we were doing in the studio, even though my eyes were blindfolded all long. I had the sensation of seeing the physical contact, the bodies, the sweat, the ropes, the texture of the clothes, the temperature of the metal, the density of the breath. I can still visualise it clearly, and I dreamt of it several times.

Sometimes I was easily oriented, while other times I didn't know where I was at all. I got extremely tired. It was sensorial fatigue. The whole body, muscles, mind, emotions, and other senses were trying to supply the sight to re-classify the world according to my usual parameters. I was trying to orient myself and know where everything was. All my energy was used for this. After a few hours of stimulation, I needed to lay down and “close my eyes”. Around the

⁹ *A(h)! NO rmalidades* was carried out by Elena Zanzu in 2017 within the framework of the Creative Europe programme De Mar a Mar, with residencies at La Central del Circ and La Grainerie.

¹⁰ Especially Tiziana Masala, Sabrina Catalán, Oriol Escursell, Griselda Juncà.

fourth day, I began to feel emotionally exhausted. At that moment I realised that, maybe, I had to stop trying to re-place everything in the same place where my eyes had left it. Stop pretending nothing was happening. Stop controlling, systematising, and fixing things. Stop wanting to know the colour of the shirts I was wearing. And stop wanting to know who was around me. I had to welcome disorientation. The fourth day was the hardest, but it somehow allowed the passage from the attempt to reproduce something known, to the opening to other possibilities, to other points of (non) view. I had been trying to fit into a standard narrative of how the world should be experienced, without hindrance or failure. However, if not seeing was meant here to challenge the system (here, the vision system) and not function as a point in the system that needed to be fixed, then failure needed to be embraced. I felt that within not seeing there was another space, where it was not necessary to see. And within this space not seeing itself was a force. Do you remember it, dear privilege?

The fifth day, the last day in the studio, I worked alone. I closed the door and turned off all the lights. I tied myself

to a hoist system and began to move between ground and air. The hoist itself is a space that can create a safe perimeter. This experience modified my way of perceiving myself in space and my way of moving. This was also the last time I swung on a trapeze: I recognised the farewell, *la despedida*.

At the end of the seventh day, dear privilege, we opened our eyes again. Seeing again made me dizzy, nauseated, and shaking. I didn't know how to re-embed the view in my references. For the last week, that sense had become unaccustomed to work and was giving me information that I did not know how to interpret.

Privilege, we have been able to choose to temporarily live that experience in the name of research, even slightly funded. Our experience of being blindfolded and playing with not seeing for a week was of course a completely different experience from being blind. And being blind is not reducible to having an absence of sight. And you, my privilege, didn't just come back when I removed the patches from my eyes, you were with me all the time. When I perceived that I was being made invisible, when I felt anger and exhaustion,

when I received a grant, when I had insights, when I said goodbye to swinging, when I walked on the street with a white cane (yes, I even did that), you were taking care of me. And so, you are now that I am writing. And when you take care of me, dear privilege, you do it in such a way that can feel nice to me, especially if I don't notice you, and I think that I am alone. Because then I don't notice that you are stealing somewhere else what you give to me. And that I am your accomplice. Dear privilege, we have to talk way more.

After that, I went to Joan's place. We met in the street, and I blindfolded myself before entering his place. There, we improvised for hours. Then, still blindfolded, he accompanied me outside and said "yes, let's do a residency together".

Dear accessibility,

In the performance *EZ*¹¹ the audience receives an invitation for a person to volunteer entering the stage. Without too much spoiling now, the person will be suspended and will make the scene possible, with their (counter)weight and with their engagement in a dialogue with me.

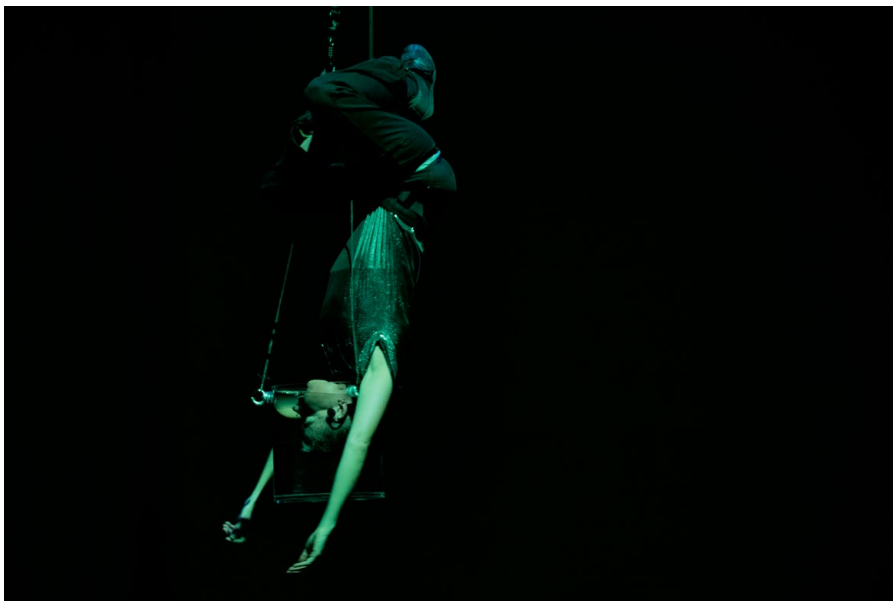
I wanted the invitation to be open and accessible. Dreaming of you, accessibility, I realised that the question wasn't if something is accessible or not, but to whom it is accessible and to whom it is not. Which bodies I am inviting on stage, and which I am not. A shift in perspective. And then, being honest about it. And then thinking about how to communicate it, how to formulate the invitation.

It is important to recognise limitations. Some limitations are in the equipment and the rigging systems. But the equipment and the rigging systems are a choice. Does accessibility for some, inevitably means inaccessibility for others? For example, strobe lights can be perceived in a disturbing way from



EZ by Elena Zanzu © Mila Ercoli

¹¹ *EZ*, performance by Elena Zanzu, premiered in 2022.



EZ by Elena Zanzu © Mila Ercoli

someone who is epileptic, but they could be a powerful tool for someone deaf. And at the end, there are choices to be made. And the need to abandon the illusion of accessibility as a static and absolute value.

Accessibility, you are also a negotiation.

Dear exhaustion,

I was writing the last letter to care when you manifested yourself claiming yours. So, well, here I am, with you.

Years ago, during a residency I was car(ry)ing, one person had a breakdown. The day after we were expected to perform a work in progress in a festival, but she couldn't. It felt like negotiating care. How to take care of her, while taking care of the rest of the team, and also taking care of the project, and of the festival, and of the audience who was coming. And assuming that taking care of myself would automatically come afterward. My colleague was injured. Sometimes injuries are not in the body. Yet, they are very similar. How do we take care of them? How do we communicate them? Why is there such a shame in mental suffering?

Exhaustion, you come to remind me to live. Sometimes, I need a break. Yet sometimes when I need a break, I don't take it. Then something inside says, "please, stop, or I'll make you do so". I negotiate, "I will take a break, yes, but let me just finish this or that". This negotiation doesn't always work. Sometimes a part of me shuts down. And all the other parts of what I call "me" need to readjust. It is probably a mix of precarity, western capitalism, workaholism and (the closet of) neurodiversity that makes me force my own boundaries. I am more comfortable doing things that are difficult for most, than doing some (commonly considered) easy tasks. But sometimes I don't want to go out of that closet, and I push a different me.

Exhaustion, you come to me with a sensation of disgust toward something I am supposed to do (such as answering emails). I recognise in me two kinds of reactions to that: letting go or fighting. If I expect you, or if you let me negotiate the timings, then I go for the first response. I let go, grateful for the vivid reminder of life. But if you surprise me, I would probably be more attached to function, and fight you.

Last week, I had a conversation with Hèctor – who may join the EZ team – about the role of the producer. There is something in the role of the producer, similar to the role of the dramaturg, as both often tacitly assume the role of a caregiver and a psychologist¹² of a company. I can relate to the notes of Sebastian Kann¹³. Then, who takes care of the producer? Hèctor, how would you like to be taken care of?

Dear exhaustion, how do we take care of you? I often invite the physical part of you to my practice. You allow my rational mind to rest, and other states to manifest. Durational practices, repetition, duration, repetition. If I am too much in my thoughts, the exhaustion of the body opens a window to fresh air and let the excess of thoughts leave the room. This kind of exhaustion is precious to me.

How often do I not respect my (artistic) boundaries? How can I forget the sustainability of the practice? How often do I forget to say no to work? Where are the non-working hours? How is it possible to work all the time and struggle paying rent? Why doesn't the invisible work count? Is the Confucian proverb "choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life" a trap? Where is the self-care?

Dear exhaustion, thank you for the reminders, for the questions, for the care, for the empathy, for the encouragement to delegate, for the teaching of trust, for the impulse to generate a community and for the joy of saying no. Thank you for bringing me to the sea and to watch the stars at night. Thank you for the hugs. And for the perspective. Thank you for the dissociation, for the distance. Thank you for the connection, for the enthusiasm of remembering to live.

Dear exhaustion, let's have a break now.

¹² Cvejić Bojana, "The Ignorant Dramaturg" in *Maska* (2010).

¹³ Kann Sebastian, "Some queer notes on doing dramaturgy with love" in *Thinking through Circus* (2020).

INTIMATE DIVERSITIES – AN ECOPOLITICAL APPROACH TO CIRCUS

A conversation entwined by Eleonora Gimenez and Lucie Bonnet



Lucie Bonnet is a French aerialist and doctoral student in the Performing Arts (specialised in Circus Arts) at Grenoble Alpes University (UMR 5316 Litt&Arts, ED LLSH, France) under the supervision of Gretchen Schiller and Marion Guyez. Her thesis on contemporary aerial practices, which she began in October 2020, relies heavily on her position as a vertical rope practitioner and her close links with the circus world and its know-how. Her doctoral research examines the complexity of the processes involved in creating performances based on experimentation with aerial materials and aesthetics, leading to a renewal of the technical and physical language of circus forms.

🌐 <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lucie-bonnet-2119521b3/>



Eleonora Gimenez is an Argentinian slackrope, stage director, and artistic director of Company Proyecto Precipio (France). Having studied Sociocultural Anthropology from the National University of Rosario (Argentina) and training in the circus arts – initially self-taught, then at the Académie Fratellini (Saint-Denis, France) –, she is particularly interested in the grey areas where the circus touches on the human sciences and the various forms of expression in the performing arts. She has lived and worked in France since 2008. Eleonora won the "Authors in Tandem" scheme run by ARTCENA for the 2023/2024 season alongside Julie Aminthe. This initiative encourages two authors, one from the theatre and the other from the circus, to meet and work together on a cross-disciplinary writing project.

E: You know when you are on the rope?

L: Yes?

E: Do you ever feel like you're somebody else?

Foreword

Based on the common experience of corporeality – an experience that we share with an infinitely diverse multiplicity of living beings –, we have chosen to raise the question of “what makes a body diverse”, as a starting point for a wider reflection on the matter of the diversity of bodies in the circus arts. This deep dive into the diversity of “the intimate”, as shaped by the environment, is based on a more vast question: how does the circus, as an embodied practice, allow for the acknowledgement of its own diversity? And what happens once the floodgates have been opened?

The very subject of “diverse bodies” calls for polyphony, encounters with others, and the pooling of experiences. To multiply the number of ways in which “diversity” can be recognised and reflected upon, we decided to weave this dialogue together. This clash of ideas brings to the forefront a number of contradictions, a diversity of voices, and varied writing methodologies. This text is the result of vivid reflection, of questions thrown out and answers caught on the fly to form an instantaneous translation from which a common thought emerges, before being unravelled and rewoven by the two of us.

*Clinging to the intimacy of a subject with a strong political ring to it,
Using my body as the terrain, I set out in search of an embodied reality.*

An archaeology of myself.

*Armed only with my experience, I observe the diversity in my pores,
in my muscles,
in my scars.*

*Updating my own transformations,
I embrace the line and bind the memories.*

Preface

What does it mean to have a body? What does it mean to be diverse?

The term “body” all too often conjures up images of the human body as the ultimate body. But in addition to diversity in terms of geography, cultures, society, generations, genders, and ableness, we must also consider the diversity of living things, seen here as an opportunity to “become one” with the environment. By broadening the spectrum of what the word “body” can mean, it becomes clear that the experience of “corporeality” requires a specific context. As such, we are never “just a body”, and cannot be “somebody” alone. Camille de Toledo wrote that the body is a “crystallisation of connections”¹, and that “we are not isolated bodies”². Our bodies are part of a social, political, ecological, and historical construction, and we are different and diverse in relation or in opposition to this construction.

The question of “diverse bodies” is therefore posed through an infinite multitude of prisms and possible readings. In relation to whom, what, and when are we diverse? In relation to what corporeal parameters are our bodies diverse? What histories? What policies?

By incorporating these questions, we choose to position ourselves within a framework that attempts to go beyond identity-based hierarchies³ in order to conceive of a transcorporeal diversity [“I am a body in concert with ...”] and to reach a perspective of minute diversity that focuses on intimacy [“I am a multitude of diversities within myself”]. **From this shift in scale emerges an ecopolitical approach to circus practices and an invitation to integrate intimate diversity into individual practices, with a view to creating a circus experience tailored to each individual.**

When the veil is lifted on everything that composes a body, and on the various ways in which each person defines this term, we get the feeling that corporeality goes beyond the boundaries that are conventionally accepted. From this broader consideration of what makes up and characterises a body emerges a unique way of inhabiting it. It would seem that “corporeality” implies intimate diversity, which is not something to be invented, but rather to be discovered and embraced. This observation leads to another: to think of the body as diverse through its lived experiences is a pleonasm, if not a tautology. The body is diverse in and of itself; the body is a body. The state of “being corporeal” necessarily implies “being diverse”.

*I feel like an archaeological reserve of corporeal strata.
Like a constant moult, I observe what changes, what stays, what transitions.
The body over time
The body after a physical injury
The body after an emotional injury
The body after childbirth
The body after two births
The body after an abortion
The body after bereavement
The body after enjoying
The body whose memory imposes its multiplicity of experiences
These bodies are actualised and reactualised, in a constant state of resilience.
I am, thus, already a diversity of myself.*

Traces of experience, connections with connections with practice and its apparatus

L: When does intimate diversity become apparent?

¹ Camille de Toledo, *Thésée, sa nouvelle vie (Theseus, his new life)*, Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 2020, p. 10.

² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

³ This is not to neglect nor to deny the urgent need to recognise diverse bodies and the difficulty they have in being represented in the circus as much as everywhere else, but to recognise the stigmatising aspect of the categories through which these diversities are viewed. See: “[...] how can we develop antidotes to the identity-based hierarchies that separate us and prohibit encounters by containing beings within the toxic categories of modernity and coloniality (gender, race, class, species, ableness...)?”, Emma Bigé, *Mouvementements - Ecopolitiques de la danse*, Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2023, p. 17.

E: For me, this question of intimacy is linked to the practice of the circus arts, which in my case is balancing on a slackrope. This practice, combined with its associated apparatus, makes it possible for me to recognise and stand by my own diversities.

L: What do you mean by “practice” exactly? How do you define “apparatus”?

E: For me, the combination of the practice itself and its associated apparatus gives form to a kind of alter ego. It creates a place where you can confirm or refute your own questions and theories, a place where you can feel at home and reveal the ever-changing states of your body. I suppose that it is, among other things, a place where the body can be observed.

This passionate practice, which is so demanding of the body, accompanies my experiences. How do the events of your life align with your practice of your art? How does the encounter between the two confound our perception of ourselves and our multi-unity? Each time we return to our practice, we recognise what is there, what is no longer there, and what is possible.

*Coming back to the circus,
It's like coming home, but in a different way.
This place where you live without thinking, just because it's there,
because it has always been there.
Recognising and integrating the layers of oneself.
Listening to and accepting what your body is saying.
Making memories material.*

L: How do the intimate diversities and changes you see in your practice mould your art? How do they mould you?

E: After every life-changing event, another body appears. By practising the circus arts, they become a mirror, showing me where I am, and how many layers of my own experience I have accrued.

Returning to the circus arts has allowed me to realise that I am no longer the same person I was before, and that my body is no longer the same body trained in this discipline.

The practice itself is an intimate aspect, in this place of self-recognition, of the changes that lead to diversity: in other words, of the new corporeal strata that are added, juxtaposed, and superimposed. Death and birth – the experiences of mourning and of giving birth – are two extremes that have shaken up my practice of balancing; they have collided with my once-incorporated vocabulary and prompted me to find other forms of movement.

It's as if my body had become foreign... And on the rope, it takes cognisance of the **vestiges of itself** in a technique that has become obsolete. The body tries to find new paths, in direct resonance with what it has been through.

There are major events in each person's life, but there are also nuances that mean that even everyday life brings its share of diversities that manifest themselves in emotions, ailments, failures, and renewals.

L: The body goes through events that are remembered and remain. For me, the vertical rope becomes the place where I observe and actualise myself, the place where I arrange the new layers of myself, coming to terms with what has been and what is to come. In other words, if I take note of all these layers, my circus practice can reflect my internal geology.

E: Yes, completely. Even after being away from the rope for a while, and not practising my art, it's still the same experience. Beyond the trauma, the fact of not practising regularly means a deeper reconnection when I do come back. It's also a kind of refuge, even a relief when once you realise that some things remain the same, and don't change. Like a solid foundation for getting back out there. That's why I like to talk about archaeology, about strata, about the notion of multiple “selves”, and about several bodies that live together in harmony.

L: But how do we find the openness not to remain solely in an experience of the self that becomes egocentric, even a little anthropocentric?

Life experience, connections, and the laws of nature

L: We agree that the practice of circus arts and the connection to the apparatus itself make it possible to awaken intimate diversity. But how do you extricate yourself from the archaeological dig that is introspection? In simpler terms, how do you go from micro to macro?

E: That's the opening question of our text, and that comes up in our initial dialogues. For me, this idea of the transcorporeal aspect is that of creating a body beyond our bodies. It's not just a question of looking at ourselves and referring to ourselves. On the contrary, this introspection as you put it is the way to a broader and, in my opinion, more necessary and more urgent observation. Something more along the lines of "double openness (infracorporeal and transcorporeal) that opens the living human being to more than itself".⁴

Many of the metaphors for life itself can be found in the act of rope balancing: the inevitability of falling, the permanent relationship with gravity, the dependence on physical laws. The circus – a major feature of which is to play with these laws – forces us to move away from ourselves, as it encourages us to recognise that the body is in constant relationship with its environment. We are subject to physical laws that constantly actualise our bodies, and in this respect, internal diversity is an experience that is equal and shared with all living things, both human and non-human.

L: Steve Paxton defined gravity as a "basic physical circumstance of human fate"⁵, which we could amend to "of all living things", or at least "of things with mass". All circus disciplines involve an intimate relationship between the performer and their partners (the ground, the apparatus, other humans, and many more besides), which can give rise to a different – if not extraordinary – relationship with the world. You must find your balance on the rope, within yourself, but also in this within-without relationship. I cannot be on the rope without being connected, both to my own transformations and to the environment around me – which, incidentally, is what makes my aerial practice possible. Within this place born of the exceptional and the unusual, it becomes possible to experience gravity in a different way, to increase its pressure, to play with it, so the circus performer-apparatus duo can celebrate and enjoy this "basic physical circumstance".

E: It's as if you cannot practise the circus arts without being aware of your body, your environment, and the ways in which you perceive and receive them.

Mirror of practices: the ropes most travelled

Walking on the slackrope, keeping my balance, taking in the states of my body, acknowledging the micro-movements that allow me to stay in place, my connection to gravity, how close I am to the edge... What body am I in at that moment? With my desires and my everyday worries, my questions and my attempts at answers. Who is the person crossing the rope?

Not having to choose, opting for fluidity within my own layers. These stages of life and these corporeal processes – be they parallel, synchronised, or deferred –, which converse and combine and become one with the practice. No longer touching the ground, seeing my intimate diversity, reaching deep into my core.

Climbing the vertical rope, observing the world, imagining myself as immense while feeling tiny. The aches and pains from the previous day creeping up, the bruises from previous injuries adding up, and I strive, by swapping my verticality for another, to integrate them into this game with gravity. Sweaty palms, chafed skin, the rope coiled around my flesh, I gather myself in the air and capture the space around me.

⁴ Emma Bigé, *Mouvementements - Ecopolitiques de la danse*, Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2023, p. 16.

⁵ Steve Paxton. *Gravity*. Brussels: Éditions Contredanse, 2018, p. 86-87.

What does it mean to be a diverse body in the circus?

The question of inclusion

In our search for embodied knowledges, we have chosen to speak from the body, rather than about the body. We tried to put into practice what Ursula K. Le Guin advocated, namely “[...] to tell stories differently, to relay concepts that would help populate other imaginations [...]”⁶. And that's how we set off in search of our own transformations, which lead us to diversities that we have dubbed as “intimate”.

With this utopian perspective of a circus that reflects every type of diversity, the singularity of every body and of every story, there is no reason why the circus cannot be practised and performed by anyone, and thus represent every form of diversity.

So why doesn't the circus look like this in real life?

Using a piece of apparatus common to the both of us as our basis, namely the rope, each type with its own very different characteristics and uses, we tested the paradox of the circus: that of being a space-time continuum where it is possible to observe and recognise one's own diversity, while at the same time representing, among other things, the heritage of a codified technique. Indeed, we have both gone through the process of integrating the technical and aesthetic canons of the circus that result in the formatting of our bodies and draw a line under this art form, a border that is hermetically sealed off from diversity.

*Decanonising and deconstructing practices through respect and listening,
so that each body can see and acknowledge itself in its own way.*

It's not just about the self and the apparatus and the infinite connections forged with the world, as if inclusion and diversity were issues to be resolved alone.

*Taking note of what has been agreed and what has been freed up,
taking a stand,
taking one's place.*

The realm of the circus is an artistic world that continues to discriminate, always showing the same bodies and perpetuating the stereotype of strong, beautiful, young, able-bodied physiques. And yet there is an incubator of corporeal diversity in the circus, animated by those who practice it, but which is not made visible nor disseminated.

Because inclusion and inclusivity are not self-evident.

What can be done in order to overturn these obsolete representations that fail to be inclusive? Can we look for an answer in what connects us? In our view, this is a reflection that should be viewed through a transcorporeal prism, focusing on ecopolitical thinking, and accepting the connections that allow us...

...To be in this world.

⁶ Reformulation: Ursula K. Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, Paris: Éditions de l'Éclat, 2020.
Emma Bigé, *Mouvementements - Ecopolitiques de la danse*, Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2023, p. 30.

THE INTERVIEW CORNER: A BROAD SPECTRUM OF ARTISTIC APPROACHES TO A GLOBAL ISSUE



AN INTERVIEW WITH MAYLIS ARRABIT



Maylis Arrabit is a disabled dance artist from the French Basque country. She's worked as a dancer since 2017, as well as artistic director of *Habrá Que Ponerse Cachas*, touring globally since 2018 and selected in 2021 within the frame of the Perform Europe funding scheme to tour as the project *Step by Step-Wheel by wheel*. She has co-choreographed *Ice Age* with Resident Island Dance Theatre (Taiwan). It premiered in 2022 and has toured in Europe, Taiwan, and the USA. In 2022, Maylis founded In(-)Between, offering workshops and talks in Europe, aiming to foster her choreographic career. She strives to promote inclusive dance and disabled artists' leadership in the performing arts.

How does the expression “diverse body/ies” resonate with you?

“Diverse bodies” holds a personal, artistic, and political significance, as it calls upon us to truly embrace and honor the spectrum of experiences and artistry of people with diverse body shapes, sizes, and appearances that exist in our society and in the performing arts. This concept challenges the body standards and the performative ideals that have often excluded and marginalised individuals. The concept of “diverse body/ies” is interconnected with marginalised communities, as they encompass individuals whose bodies deviate from society's normative expectations, resulting in systemic marginalization and limited opportunities. To promote body diversity and empower these communities within the performing arts, we must amplify diverse representation and narratives. It requires challenging stereotypes by prominently featuring individuals of different abilities, genders, sizes, ethnic backgrounds, and understanding the unique challenges faced by those whose identities intersect, facing discrimination



Habrá Que Ponerse Cachas © Katrin Aldanondo

on multiple fronts. Creating inclusive and accessible spaces, providing comprehensive and accessible services and resources are all essential components of this transformative journey.

As a cisgender white woman and a disabled dance artist, I recognise the importance of broadening the scope

beyond physical diversity alone. We must acknowledge and value the diversity that exists within people with invisible disabilities, such as chronic illnesses, learning disabilities, and neurodiversity. Their voices and experiences deserve to be recognised, valued, and celebrated alongside the notion of “diverse bodies”.

You created the inclusive dance-theatre piece called *Habrá Que Ponerse Cachas* (translation: We'll have to get tough) in 2018, that has since been selected within the frame of the Perform Europe funding scheme to tour as the project Step by Step-Wheel by wheel. Can you tell us more about this project, and what was the starting point for it? How did the project evolve since its first presentation?

Habrá Que Ponerse Cachas (HQPC) is an inclusive dance theater duet that I have directed and created in collaboration with disabled and non-disabled dancers Xabier Madina and Ebi Soria. It explores identity within the family and evolving sibling relationships.

The piece was based on two kids, Ari and Uzi, from Wes Anderson's movie "The Royal Tenenbaums". They live in a wild family with power dynamics and neurosis. I love telling stories about human relationships and was interested in these characters being adults and if their sibling relationship evolved. What do we forget from childhood as adults? Our playful and interdependent inner child is not always far away.

Originally designed for theatre performances, HQPC premiered in Bremen, Germany, in April 2018. It was later showcased in the public space during the Lekuz Leku Festival in Bilbao, receiving positive feedback on its quality and impact. With guidance from choreographer Janice Parker, funded by Etxepare Basque institute, a new version was adapted for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August 2019. The success of this version led to its promotion in future festivals and events.

Habrá Que Ponerse Cachas was selected for the Perform Europe funding scheme as part of the Step by Step-Wheel by Wheel project. Through this program, we performed 10 times in Denmark (Helsingør festival/PAS-



Habrá Que Ponerse Cachas © Katrin Aldanondo

SAGE festival), in Sweden (VTST, Halmstad) and in France (Festival No(s) Limit(s) - Montpellier), reaching new audiences and gaining valuable touring experience. We are grateful for the partnership's quality and the efforts made to ensure accessibility and sustainability of our work.

Alongside touring, we also engage with the public through Q&A sessions and inclusive dance workshops, introducing our meaningful and innovative inclusive practice. In our co-led workshop, we place a great importance on disabled artists within our collective sharing their movement interests and vocabulary. We explore a creative task from the piece and introduce inclusive "imagery language", avoiding exclusionary dance terminology. Participants love diving deeper into our work and appreciate disabled artists leading, offering a fresh perspective on dance classes.

As a dancer, how did your personal experience impact the creative process of this project?

Starting dance later in life, I mainly learned in mainstream classes, lacking access to inclusive exercises and creative tasks. I often had to find ways to translate my teachers' instructions.

The challenge sometimes blurred with frustration. As an artistic director, I value dancers' potential, recognise their creative strengths, and seek alternative approaches to movement representation, embracing their unique abilities and limitations.

This project aimed to give more visibility to artists with disabilities, both on and behind the stage. What was important for you in this project as the artistic director? Is your artistic approach predominant, or do you build around the message you want to convey? Do you believe it is the responsibility of artists to raise awareness on these issues?

Our primary goal as a collective of artists was to create an entertaining dance theatre piece, spreading our story far and wide. Our second aim as a collective was to create a dance theatre piece that is easily accessible and enjoyable to all. Audience feedback during our tour made us realise the impact of our work on the representation of disabled individuals, particularly as I, a disabled woman and emerging artist, led the project.

As an artistic director, this piece embodies my vision of inclusive practice.

Disabled and non-disabled dancers are equal participants in the movement creation, fully committed and thriving in the creative process and on stage. The representation of bodies holds significance in our work. Dancing in a power-chair is celebrated for its joy and power, creating exciting movement dynamics. Instead of focusing on technicality and physicality, I found artistic meaning in simplicity, absurdity, uniqueness, complicity, and the nuanced details that distinguish and embody virtuosity.

In my collaborations and subsequent dance productions, I find inspiration

Would you say inclusivity and the connection to a diverse audience is a topic addressed by many artists around you at the moment? If so, why?

I can't speak for other marginalised communities, but in my experience, the inclusion of disabled artists and audiences is often overlooked by artists and institutions in our field. It seems to stem from the overall lack of accessibility in our society, which excludes members of our community from public schools, cultural events, public areas, and more. If people don't

ding. Dedicated policies and budgets have made a difference, but knowledge dissemination remains a priority.

In my opinion, to promote sustainable inclusivity, it is crucial to prioritise and adequately fund accessibility. Outdoor performances can effectively engage audiences and provide access to culture. Financial support for disabled artists should consider their unique needs, taking into consideration the inclusion of access workers in production costs. Institutions should prioritise diverse voices, compensate for knowledge, and give priority to lived experiences in discussions about inclusion. Let's work together towards a caring and inclusive world!



Habrá Que Ponerse Cachas © Katrin Aldanondo

from music, movies, and, most importantly, the people I work with. I relish in storytelling and challenging dominant narratives. Key elements of my creative process include highlighting the complexities of individuals, both ordinary and unique, making the invisible visible to captivate audiences, and reinforcing my aesthetic as a disabled artist. I embrace this identity as rich and positive, transcending societal norms and expectations of “overcoming” and “outperforming”. For me, virtuosity resides in the interplay between intimacy and the ordinary, messiness and subtlety, power and vulnerability.

have the opportunity to meet and interact, how can true diversity and inclusion occur?

The report “Time To Act: Two Years On”¹ commissioned by the British Council (in the context of Europe Beyond Access and authored by On the Move, Ed.) reveals low familiarity with works by disabled artists among professionals. However, progress in accessibility is evident yet slow and complex. Awareness is growing in countries prioritising equality, diversity, and inclusion. Regional differences persist, with Northern and Western countries lea-

¹ <https://on-the-move.org/work/events/online-report-launch-time-act-two-years>



A JOINT INTERVIEW OF DARYA EFRAT AND DIANE NIEPCE



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darya efrat makes performances and installations that move with, between, and in relation to space, material and others. Emerging from violent histories and multi-generational migration, the works attempt to reconcile questions concerning identity, gender, and belonging. They are developed in-between Jerusalem, New York, Porto, Stockholm, and Zagreb. The practice was nurtured by many people along the way, and at Columbia University in New York's visual arts and anthropology departments. Most recently, it was supported by the Masters in New Performative Practices at the Stockholm University of the Arts.

daryaefrat.com



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Diana Niepce is a Dancer, choreographer, and writer. Creator of the pieces "Raw a Nude" (2019) with Mariana Tengner Barros, "12 979 Days" (2019), "Duet" (2020), "T4" (2020), "Anda, Diana" (SPA Prize, 2021) and "The other side of dance" (2022). As a contemporary dancer and performer, she collaborated with national and international artists. Curator of formations for disabled and non disabled artists and researcher of non normative bodies in dance. Author of "Anda, Diana" and the children's short story "Bayadére".

aniepce.com

How does the expression "diverse body/ies" resonate with you?

darya efrat: When thinking about diverse body/ies, I think about histories. Bodies extending through time, bodies moving in-between spaces, bodies that carry traces of other bodies, bodies that are not seen.

I also think about how these diverse bodies meet and where, and how - despite the many apparent differences - they are actually similar in many ways. In addition, I think about the notion of "The Body" and how the prevailing perception of it - as a constant, stable entity - must be questioned. Diversity is integral, and bodies are in continuous flux with internal contradictions. This diversity must be celebrated.

An image that comes to mind is the dissonant diversity in a metro car, with its collection of bodies all heading in the same direction - yet each with its own motive, planned route, and desired destination. Extending this metaphor, the cacophonous collection of travelers needs the facilitation of the metro car and its structure to co-exist, and therefore the consideration of acces-

sibility must go hand in hand with the work involving diverse body/ies.

Diana Niepce: I believe that the cultural sector is still learning to work with the notions of diversity. They are still searching how to create more accessible and fair labour practices.

The body in the performing arts has been designed according to a norm, often ableist. And destroying systemic models implies a place of revolution and violence. To exist in a body outside the norm is to exist in a state of revolution. There will always be my body and then the other's body, and they always differ by their own experience and specificity. However, we must not forget that we experience the world from our own experience, and this implies that the barriers the other has to overcome are invisible to us. This makes the discourses of oppression and exclusion often accepted, neglectful of the impact they have on the other and on society. It is very dangerous to talk about diversity, and forget that we are not all in the same place, that the places of thinking about artistic creation are still designed according to a norm, and when you are not part of it you are excluded.

What comes first in your creation process? Is your artistic approach predominant or do you build around the social message you want to convey?

DN: My practices and creations arise out of internal and social conflict. I spend a lot of time alone in research and living and resisting in the conflict. So, months later, when I go to the studio, I already have a lot of material to work on. However, my works are about existentialism and a philosophical place of observing the widespread norms in society. From the moment I am in the studio and imposing conflict in a practice from the abstract and philosophical realm, everything becomes a game of limits.

The message and concept follow its own course, which often comes from stripping and elimination until the essence and rawness of the action remains. Since working on conflicts is often about solving problems, I spend a lot of time solving problems in creation and taking into account that many of them arise from the fact of the incomprehension of others towards my own body, which differs from that of others.



Tired out – performance of darya efrat © Um Coletivo

de: I can relate very much to the idea of problem-solving – it is very present in the processes and practices I have adopted as well. I’ve just been calling it “finding solutions” or “solution searching” (a terminological shift I’ve been trying to introduce into my practice). When making work I often find myself in a constant negotiation with limitations, and it is in these “solution searches” that the artistic idea becomes entangled with the desire to convey a message. To me, the message is integral to the process, indeed inseparable from it, and I strive – cognisant of the constraints - to find solutions that preserve that integrity. The artistic approach is intertwined with the idea that stands behind the work.

Similarly to you, Diana, I too spend much time thinking, planning, and preparing alone, to ensure that once others are invited in, I can offer or bring forward the setting and conditions I believe are essential to create a safe, caring, fruitful, and enjoyable working environment and process. I don’t always succeed, but creating and providing these conditions are fundamental.

Do you believe it is the responsibility of artists to raise awareness on these issues? Do you think bringing diversity into contemporary circus and outdoor arts can make long-term changes?

de: I feel this is a leading question. Raising awareness is vital, and therefore the simple answer would be: “Yes”. However, I also think raising awareness can come in many different forms - not merely by addressing explicit subject matters. Raising awareness can be achieved in the multiplicity of ways of working. The responsibility of raising awareness shouldn’t fall solely on the shoulders of the artists, but rather be taken into consideration by others involved in the process of art-making - including the programmers and the producers. How can diversity and other pressing issues be included in the process of making work? How can we not only think of diversity in terms of bodies but also in terms of methods, contexts, accessibility, relationships and power structures, as well as aesthetics? How can multiplicity become integral to the entire process from its inception?

I believe if these questions would be asked, a shift would take place, one that moves away from the singular final product to include a layered and diverse

relationship to the process of making artistic work and sharing it with others.

DN: I believe that it is part of social responsibility to make the world an accessible place for everyone. These causes cannot always be the responsibility of the oppressed. The structures and the rest of the industry are equally responsible for making their works accessible to all. Otherwise, we are discriminating.

Not long ago I heard about artists who refused to use sign language because it “spoiled their work” while saying that no one in a wheelchair would want to see their piece. I believe that these acts of discrimination should have consequences, and it is the responsibility to change the systemic models around creation.

There needs to be more time for creation, use of resources to make the work accessible to all, the spaces of creation and presentation have an obligation to be accessible for both the audience and the artist.

We are exhausted from raising awareness, we want to see change, and we want to be represented by people from the community itself.

How did the local audience welcome and react to your projects? Did you notice differences depending on the country in which the performance was being toured? If so, what are the main challenges you regularly face when touring or producing a project ?

DN: The audience always reacts in a very emotional and effusive way around my creations. I assume that their rawness and exposure generates and works tensions that promote empathy, while working according to risk, on a body that is usually observed as fragile, forces us to rethink our own condition as a spectator.

Producing or circulating projects by disabled artists, still implies an active struggle in the way their labour rights are implemented. Rehearsal spaces are still not 100% accessible in terms of circulation. Sign language resources to work with the deaf community are expensive and there are no specific funds either to work with a deaf performer or to implement the resource in the performance. There are no funds for audio description, personal or creative assistants, and this inexistence unbalances a process of equality in artistic creation.

de: I of course, do not experience the challenges Diana mentions in relation to artistic production. Nonetheless, I can relate to certain difficulties involved in bringing an artistic project to life. It requires enormous effort – and is especially challenging for independent freelance artists. I spend a disproportionate amount of time on production activity – whether it be applying for funding, residencies, open calls, festivals, or exhibitions. So much work goes into maintaining both the artistic process itself and sharing it with the public. My encounters and exchanges with many other creatives confirm that this is a shared experience, and I would claim that one of the main issues stems from the way this very question is formulated. Artists must be able to focus on content and practice, rather than taking on production responsibilities. I've sometimes heard in discussion panels at festivals and conferences that if there were more producers the situation would improve. But who would bear their costs? As of now, the expense is borne by the artists. This is unsustainable and must be changed.

When it comes to touring, I haven't had much experience with this - partly due to the challenges mentioned above. Until now, I've mainly shared work in contexts where I had local affinities. I would like to share work more extensively, but because my practice is community and partici-

patory-oriented and designed to be as environmentally considerate as possible, working locally is integral. Current touring and production models tend to promote fast-paced and short-term processes. I recognise that this is gradually shifting; however, in consideration of both environmental concerns and artists' resources (both physical and emotional), I would call for programmers, producers, cultural organisers, and funding bodies to continue re-examining current models and strive to create more sustainable infrastructures that will counter the fast-paced, instantaneous, emotionally non-sustainable art economy.



Anda, Diana – performance of Diana Niepce © AP



AN INTERVIEW WITH DONIKA RUDI



Donika Rudi is a Brussels-based, Kosovar composer specialised in acousmatic, electroacoustic music. Since 2010 she is the Artistic Director of ReMusica Festival in Kosovo, associate artist at IN SITU - European Platform for artistic creation in public space, led by Lieux publics (2020-2024). She works as coordinator of the European Festivals Fund for Emerging Artists - EFFEFA within EFA and she is member as composer within FEBEME - BEFEM (Fédération belge de musique électroacoustique) and CEC (Canadian Electroacoustic Community).

How does the expression "diverse body/ies" resonate with you?

The expression "diverse body/ies" for me means uniqueness, the beauty of diversity, inclusion, and acceptance while embracing the differences. I can easily relate this to the sound diversity, sound world. As an acousmatic composer, my work with sounds has taught me to be even more attentive to the various sound textures, shapes and sizes. My work process starts with understanding these differences, characters, sound personalities. It continues by exploring the new textures until the creation of the piece – composed of layers, using all of the different sounds available to me, including the smallest, microscopic, tiniest sounds to the heavy, deep, low sounds. At the end, this process beco-

mes a celebration of diversity, as each sound contributes something unique to the whole (to the composition) - the same as for the bodies, personalities, abilities and disabilities.

We should understand that we all have different bodies, from fluidity to physical limitations. My goal as a composer is to create music that is inclusive of these differences and allows "each body" to be a part of the whole. Whether someone is experiencing the music through their ears, their skin, or their heart, each person's contribution but also perception are meaningful and integral to the overall experience. My focus these past few years has been on climate change and exploring new ways to experience music and allow everyone to engage with and be a part of

the music, no matter their perceptual ability or background. My invitation to my work is to experience music not only through auditory means but also through other senses. We all perceive music differently. Every individual is different. Not everyone can listen the way you do. Not everyone can perceive the way you do.

By incorporating different sensory experiences, I create music that is inclusive and accessible to a wider audience.

You are an IN SITU associate artist on the (UN)common Spaces project. What is your role in it? What did it bring to your artistic practice?

Being an IN SITU associate artist of the (UN)common spaces project opened new doors to the experience of working and connecting to creations in public spaces. Coming from a traditional compositorial background as a composer of instrumental, mixed and acousmatic music, I grew up artistically listening and performing my pieces indoors in concert halls, theatres and closed spaces. When invited to be an associate artist with IN SITU and create new works in public space, I discovered a completely different world of thinking. I came across a new way of working, the importance of the connection created with the audience, and I understood how their presence and interaction might change my point of view, my way of thinking and creating.

As it turned out, it was also a deeper connection with nature, city, explora-



Lament of the Earth © Hapu Festival, Kosovo

tion and research between the inner and outer sound world. Between 2020 and today, I had the opportunity to collaborate with other artists within the network, such as Zineb Benzekri with whom we worked on *The INSANE* project - a participative and immersive project mixing installations, soundscapes, and performances - and show my work at many IN SITU partner festivals, including the premieres in Kosovo at Hapu Festival in Prishtina. After all, creating is essentially this: to focus on the platform to collaborate, to be connected with European audiences, and to be present on a European scale.

Being an artist and a director of a music festival of ReMusica Festival for years and coordinating the European

Your artistic work articulates current social concerns. What comes first in your creation process? Is your artistic approach predominant, or do you build around the message you want to convey?

I would say both, as it really depends on the context. As a composer also engaged in music for theatre and film, and as a member of FeBeME-BeFEM¹, I receive many invitations to compose for different occasions. In those cases, it is the context that defines the working process. In other cases, such as during my research, I was focused on three specific topics – climate change, sound experiences for the deaf community, and visual pieces. Rather than heading straight to work, I

ding. And as I shape and create a piece, I become more demanding about the dramaturgy, the technical details, and the logic of the piece.

You are currently developing the project “Laments of the Earth”, a cycle of audiovisual works addressing the topic of climate change and sound experiences for the deaf community while combining sign language and dance. Can you let us know more about this project and what you would like to achieve with it? How are you expecting the audience to engage with it?

The idea of the *Lament of the Earth* started when I saw the graphics of warming stripes, which visually portray long-term temperature changes on the Earth's surface. The initial piece of the Lament, an acousmatic piece, was created based on this graphic. The text “Cry of the Earth” by the dramaturg Doruntina Basha, brought by the soprano, sign language, dance and the huge costume representing the Earth were elements that came later. It was a very long process with numerous workshops, including the one I had with the deaf community during the Pergine Festival in Italy and the Hapu Festival in Kosovo. Explorations of new ways of perception were very helpful to realise that I want to focus on inclusion and create pieces open to all for a wider public, with no restrictions and no specific conditions required to be engaged.



Workshop at Pergine Festival, in Italy

Festivals Fund for Emerging Artists EFFEFA within the European Festivals Association - EFA helped me see and analyse both sides. I have experienced that networking and exchanges lead to opportunities for new and creative cooperation, as well as collaboration between programmers and artists.

conducted research, discussed, read, listened and brainstormed beforehand and was never sure if what I was creating would have an impact later on or not. The process is always fun. I like collecting sound materials, start treating the sounds, changing the form of a sound, working in layers, coming up with new materials, sound shapes, and different textures, and, then, I slowly start build-

My aim with this cycle of visual pieces is to transmit the emotion and experience of the sounds through movements, dance and “visual vernacular”². My colleagues from the deaf community, present at the premiere of the *Lament of the Earth* in Kosovo who came to congratulate me with smiles on their faces, filled me with joy. It is not a pro-

¹ Belgian Federation for Electroacoustic Music

² Visual Vernacular is a unique physical theatre technique, with elements of poetry and mime, primarily performed by deaf artists. This powerful story telling style combines strong movement, iconic sign language signs, with gestures and facial expressions, to capture the world in all its visual complexity.



Workshop at Pergine Festival, in Italy

ject created for them, but a project we have created together. In the end, the project had a huge impact, more than I imagined.

Would you say that inclusivity and the connection to a diverse audience is a topic addressed by many artists around you at the moment? If so, why?

If we speak about climate change, it is an actual subject and an alarm for all of us. As living beings on this Earth, we must react to it and take action as soon as possible. As for the topic of the deaf community, there is a thin line... I do not like defining and categorising the differences. As a human of this world, I see beyond this - inclusion means embracing differences, and we will only achieve this when we stop categorising and labelling, when we embrace any kind of diversity when we lift barriers and allow a better and free circulation between countries.

Do you believe it is the responsibility of artists to raise awareness on these issues? Do you believe creation in the public space can make a long-term difference?

Through art, we have the power to change and bring up these issues, open dialogue, inspire, and take action. Through creation in the public space, we are a voice and communicator. We connect directly with the audience. We interact, and the public becomes part of the creation: it is a synergy. It is a form of activism through which we can bring visibility and raise awareness of different issues, including the promotion of inclusivity, to break down barriers between cultural diversity, and move further toward a more connected and harmonious society.



AN INTERVIEW WITH NIKOLINA KOMLJENOVIĆ



© Boris Vidošević

Nikolina Komljenović holds an M.A. in Art History and Comparative Literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. She is a performer, choreographer, aerialist, contemporary dancer, pedagogue and producer of the Experimental Free Scene Association (ekscena). Her main interest is the idea of the performativity of the body as a subject, exploring notions of movement, gaze, voice, presence, space, time, light and relation at the molecular, experiential and relational levels. Nikolina approaches the work in a dialogue between all these elements directly on stage.

How does the term “diverse bodies” resonate with you?

The inclusion and representation of individuals with different identities, backgrounds and physical attributes is what I see as “diverse bodies” in general and also in performative practices. It is an acknowledgement and celebration of the wide range of experiences, perspectives and abilities that exist within the human population.

used to determine success. It makes us feel attractive or unattractive, confident or not. This ideal body image is uni dimensional and is a celebration of youth alone, as if ageing does not exist. Diversity brings richness. Embracing different racial and ethnic backgrounds, being transgender, non-binary or gender non-conforming, valuing all body sizes and shapes, a wide range of physical and cognitive abilities and age groups, allows for a richer and more authentic repre-

body. The body is a force and also a mirror of our habits, of our knowledge and of our memories.

Bodies.

They are different.

No body is the same.

No two minds think alike.

So how could we create norms?

Let's celebrate diversity!

In your project *An Object is transferring into the Subject #SPINE*, you are placing the specificity of each body as a priority, and holding diversity as a positive thing. Can you tell us more about your exploration of this concept in this particular work?

The body is our essence. We start from the Body and end up with the Body being all that is left. There is no us without the body. It is a living organism and is reshaped according to its uses. Just as water takes shape in relation to its limitations, the body uses weight and reshapes actively according to its flow in relation to the central axis.

I start with my own body. My body is extremely physically capable. At the same time, it is specific in its deformations. What is a simple movement for other performers is a hindrance for me. It sometimes prevents me from doing my work. But each body is specific and has its own limitations. The idea of my performance *An Object is transferring into the Subject #SPINE* is to make the spectator aware of her/his/their own



#SPINE © Ivan Marenić

An image of the ideal body has been created by media portrayals based on corporate sales. Every period of history finds its own image of the *ideal* body. These are models of beauty standards and we often, whether consciously or unconsciously, fall into the trap of classifying bodies according to these standards. The same parameters are often

sentation of the human experience. This openness fosters empathy, understanding and connections between performers and audiences alike. Every body is a “good” body, that is what makes it interesting. A conscious body, dependent on the countdown of the years, but in the constant presence of the sharing of what is a “beautiful”



#SPINE © Ivan Marenčić

body through the observation and perception of the possibilities and limitations of another specific body. None of the bodies are ideal, though they are perfect as they are.

The female body – mine – performs seemingly simple actions that are extremely painful for this particular body. The focus is on the possibilities and the limits that are defined by the pain. I place my body as an object in space, dissociating parts of the body in movement and exploring them individually, looking for their specific po-

tentials and pain thresholds. Each part of the body is first treated as a single layer, and then the layers are brought together in a multifaceted work, as a reconstructed whole, opening up new movement possibilities. Through objectifying and dissociating my body in parts, I look for a synthetic pathway to the subject – myself. The division between the subject (the observer) and the object (the observed) takes place within the subject itself and is transmitted in the body to be seen by the audience. I move towards the individual subjectivity of my body, star-

ting from the mechanical movement of the body-object. Through each layer of the body, the subject emerges and communicates. In general, in all of my work I emphasise the individuality and uniqueness of everyone involved. Restrictions are viewed as opportunities to find unique ways of moving.

As a contemporary circus artist, specialised in aerial silk, and a dance performer, what is your and your peers' attitude toward the topic of ageing in the performing arts, and does it translate concretely in your artistic practice? If yes, how?

Considering that I am in my 40s, and the conventional wisdom is that a circus and dance performer is active until 35, maybe 40, and then they are no longer able to perform because of accumulated injuries, wear and tear on the body, age itself. But on the other hand, on social media we see more and more 90-year-olds dancing and doing challenging gymnastics. We use the body, that is the essence of our existence. It seems that with knowledge and practice over so many years, we can become experts of the body. So I think that as we get older, we actually become more and more connoisseurs of that same body. We rely more on technique and ideally have a better understanding of that body in the relation to our practice and the changes that take place. At least my work is based on this thesis. By listening to the body and the impossibilities, I try to turn them into possibilities. The question is also what are our parameters, possibilities and expectations of ageing? And how do we individually adapt and come to terms with these changes?

Now that I'm in my 40s and playing a lifelong project – *An Object is transferring into the Subject #SPINE* – I am dealing with this question right now. How does the body change with the passage of time? I started the project in 2013 and premiered it in 2015. This

year I performed it twice after a break of 5 years. It was surprisingly pleasant for me to play the performance again and to see how I can apply the knowledge I have gained over the last 5 years. How I am becoming more articulate in working with the body, how I manage to isolate parts better, to move even smaller units. I am more persistent, and so I observe how the work and my limits move. The intention is to continue the project until the end of my life and to record the development and changes with a camera.

Ageing in the performing arts is a complex and individual journey. It involves adapting to physical changes, embracing new artistic directions, and continuing to contribute to the art form in meaningful ways. By recognising and valuing the contributions of ageing performers, the performing arts community can foster a more inclusive and diverse landscape that celebrates artists at all stages of their career.

Be it through your own personal solo creations or through the site-specific performance you explore the theme of pain and tactility, as well as the relationship between body and space. Why was it important for you to include and

connect with these thematic in your circus creations?

In my solo performance *An Object is transferring into the Subject #SPINE*, I explore the theme of pain, endurance and tactility. The focus is on the deformation of my body. I use that to create movement. It is formed by the pure functionality of the concrete body, i.e. the inability of the concrete body to perform certain movements. The starting point is the awareness of the complex organism that is the body itself. Starting from simple movements to the increasingly complex ones. The pain is palpable and ever-present, and through the action I push the limits of endurance. The idea is to find a way out of the pain and to improve the articulation of the body with the help of movement. Endurance of a body and space are topics I deal with in my other works as well, particularly in *The Heat*, *If I Play a New Game* and *The Thin Line* projects. I want to explore the intangible, the dissolution of forms and an atmosphere. I am interested in the created space and its constantly evolving character. Furthermore, I define space as universal, empty. The meaning is inscribed with the spectator and established by the act of performance. A realistic physical action draws viewers

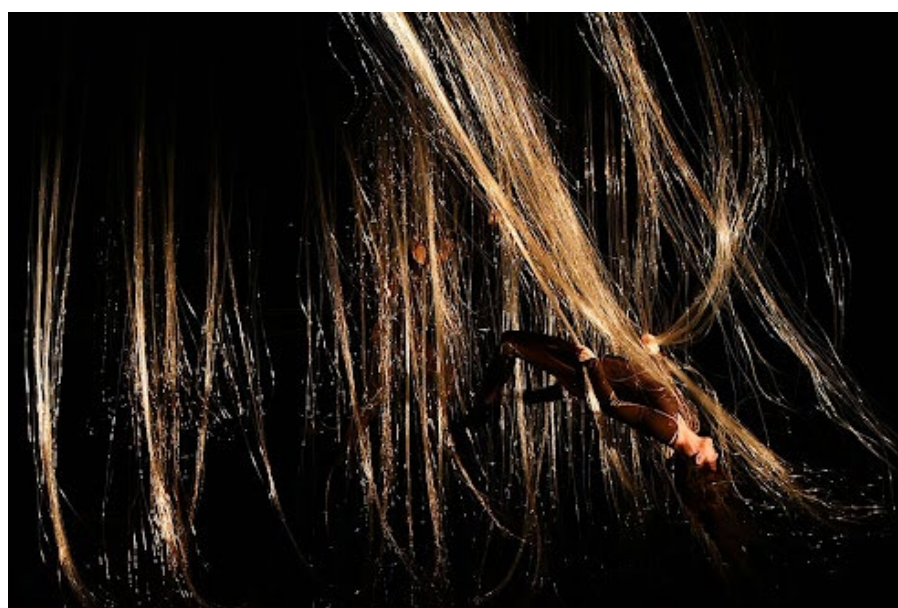
into the space of the performance, allowing them to become empathetic participants. Participatory work using the viewer's empathy is the most developed in *The Thin Line*. In all the mentioned works the space is not only physical, but also imaginary, sensory, directed by each individual's gaze. This space, observed from multiple angles, opens up a new vision and interpretation for each viewer. For example, *The Thin Line* and *If I Play a New Game* are practices that continue to add new layers of interpretation and performance with each new work and each new act of performance.

While performing these projects, what sort of reaction do you get from the audience?

The audience.
The more subtle the performance, they breathe with me, the quieter the performance, they make sure not to make any noise, they monitor the intensity and reflect the body articulations.

My performances are sensorial. They occupy the whole body and set migrating cells into action. They are not rational or coded. They are made up of a multiplication of intro(impro)-spections with a focus on performative presence, creating space-time events that form their own language of process and method of expression.

The meaning is given by the viewer. It can only exist in context, and the context for each individual member of the audience is primarily what their own memory provides. I am working on developing a real-time composition system in which the performer performs an action or an act that is not burdened by a clear and logical, symbolic or fictional meaning. It is all in the process of recognizing each individual in the space and looking for the meeting between sender and receiver, a space that both create together. In the end, I am interested in what we have created together.



The Thin Line © Ognjen Karabegović

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE

EMERGING URBAN DIVERSITIES AND THE WALKING REALM. LEARNINGS FROM ELEUSIS 2023

An article by Dimitra Kanellopoulou



Dimitra Kanellopoulou is an architect-engineer with a master's degree in urban planning and a PhD in human geography. Her PhD thesis focused on the public space planning policies and urban practices in the historical center of Athens (Greece). Since 2019 she holds the position of associate professor at the ENSAPM School of Architecture in Paris. Her research focus on urban walking, public space, soft mobility and tourism issues applied to spatial planning using both quantitative and qualitative methods and a variety of perspectives (economic, sociological, psychological) to study this area. Her teaching experience include topics of urban planning theory, urban tourism and fieldwork methodology. In 2018, she creates Politopia I walking cities, a consulting firm specialised in issues related to walkability and participatory design.

When first visiting the city of Eleusis, the small team of architects arriving from France had only one 'tool in hand', walking with the city's inhabitants, searching to explore the elements with which the modern identity of Eleusis is about to be formed. Visiting the workshop site for three consecutive years (2021-2023) and questioning the

variety of ways of experiencing public space but also searching for ways in which inherent diversity of the city could lead to emerging new spaces and opportunities of public life, was a bet that the team spontaneously wanted to take. Walking, talking with diverse minorities among the population and local actors and proposing various acts

of appropriation of off-center, abandoned spaces, the team of *Revisiting the landscapes of Eleusina* aimed to understand how investing and federating around the emergence of diverse landscapes and practices in public space can form a new collective narrative of the city's life and becoming.

The question of diversity in urban environments

The question of *diversity* has long been in the vogue of discussions in politics, urban planning and humanities' studies. In Arts, diversity has become a celebrated issue for claiming minority groups' rights and highlighting various marginal conditions. Other than a prominent subject in performing arts or staged actions, *diversity* is a structural element of human communities and has become an upper line matter in contemporary urban environments'

evolution. The difficulty of finding a proper definition of the concept is added to the difficulty of achieving diversity as a fundamental condition for human communities. While the concept of *diversity* is imminently linked to human species it is often examined through physical appearance, economic social status and body's expressions. As it concerns the physical space, *diversity* is mostly negotiated in public space through the variety of

urban forms and the multiple ways of practising the city depending on our social status, ethnic or age group.

The concept of *diversity* is linked - since the dawn of modern metropolises - to the quest of social, cultural innovation and progress. Consequently, talking about *diversity* leads professions related to the Urban, to talk about ways of inclusion and involvement of different groups of people in debates and

actions concerning the transformation of urban environments. It would not be therefore exaggerated to argue that the diversity concept is eminently linked to community and collectivity.

Since the 1960s, Art has been going outside in city's squares, piazzas, streets¹... An apparent diversity of social life in the city, hidden growing hierarchical differences in power making the living experience of the city an exposure to difference and injustice². The sociologist Richard Sennett talks about difference and diversity as primordial qualities of urban realism and invites us to take a closer look at marginal and left over spaces in order to celebrate their structural role in social and cultural life³. Although diversity is recognised as a highly valued quality for city life and urbanity, it also becomes an endangered characteristic in nowadays globalised world of homogenised trends in living and design principles⁴. Arts play a major role in cultural expression and can provide in fact an efficient 'vehicle' in promoting cultural pluralism⁵. Cities



Walk in the shipwreck area at the west coast of Eleusis, guided by Alexandros Mistriotis. Among the participants, students from the department of Seine Saint Denis. © Dimitra Kanellopoulou, 2023

are spaces of high heterogeneity and production of systematic powers of domination, exclusion, and segregation⁶. Debates are flourishing on the potential of certain environments to have a restorative role facing social marginalisation and city fabric's enclosures⁷. Different scholars suggest that problems of lack

of diversity are in fact the result of lack of urban cohesion especially between public spaces⁸. The debate is still open on how cities' diverse territories can offer new narratives on community life, citizenship empowerment and emergent public spheres in a context of recurrent economic and environmental crisis.

Walking as method to understand urban environment

Since 19th century's *flâneurs* to the seminal work of the american journalist Jane Jacobs, walking is celebrated as a medium of exploring complex urban realities and being related to modernity and urban condition⁹. From the wandering experiments of the French situationist Guy Debord to the more structured

methods of the american architect and planner Kevin Lynch, walking is progressively developed as a successful tool of exploring urban dynamics. Social sciences have for a long time worked with walking as a method of analysing living conditions, daily practices and social interactions¹⁰ as walking consi-

derably experience differs in relation to urban, social and spatial inequalities. Since the 1960s, walking has been particularly explored in arts (see the work of Richard Long or Hamish Fulton) as a practice of new modes of perception and comprehension of the relationship between space, time, body¹¹. Numerous

¹ Miles M. (1997). *Art space and the city : public art and urban futures*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203973110>

² Howell W. (2019). Anonymity and diversity: a phenomenology of self-formation in urban culture. *Topoi : An International Review of Philosophy* 471-480. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-018-9605-x>

³ Sennett R. (1994). *Flesh and stone : the body and the city in western civilization (First)*. W.W. Norton & Company

⁴ Curnier S. & Palmer R. (2023). *Universal singular : public space design of the early 21st century*. Birkhauser. Retrieved August 16 2023 from <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?>

⁵ Schensul, J. J. (1990). Organizing Cultural Diversity through the Arts. *Education and Urban Society*, 22(4), 377-392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124590022004005>

⁶ Salama, Ashraf M. and Thierstein, Alain (2012) *Rethinking urban diversity*. Open House International, 37 (2). pp. 4-5. ISSN 0168-2601

⁷ Weber AM, Trojan J. The Restorative Value of the Urban Environment: A Systematic Review of the Existing Literature. *Environ Health Insights*. 2018 Nov 26;12:1178630218812805. doi: 10.1177/1178630218812805. PMID: 30505146; PMCID: PMC6256310.

⁸ Pinto AJ, Remesar A. PUBLIC SPACE NETWORKS AS A SUPPORT FOR URBAN DIVERSITY. *Open House International*. 2012;37(2):15-23. <https://login.portail.psl.eu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/public-space-networks-as-support-urban-diversity/docview/2299746520/se-2>.

⁹ Chad Bryant, Arthur Burns, Paul Readman, Chad Bryant, Arthur Burns, Paul Readman, *Walking Histories 1800-1914*, 2016

¹⁰ O'Neill M. & Roberts B. (2020). *Walking methods : research on the move*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315646442>

¹¹ Hahn, Daniela. "Performing Public Spaces, Staging Collective Memory: '50 Kilometres of Files' by Rimini Protokoll." *TDR (1988-)* 58, no. 3 (2014): 27-38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24584814>.



Walk in the area of the abandoned factory for the production of wine and spirits, KRONOS
© Dimitra Kanellopoulou, 2022

books deal with the question of walking as an operational element of understanding a city's function and evolving imaginaries¹². As Andrew Goodman suggests¹³ "*Walking invites an intimacy and active engagement with the singularities composing an experience that splits the homogenising actions of the city*". The anthropologists Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst invite us to focus

on the link between social rhythms, emotions and thinking¹⁴. WalkingLab, an international research-creation project, proposes the creation of collaborative networks around walking methodologies and pedagogy¹⁵. For the artist Claire Blundell Jones walking is an act of placemaking and embodied experience¹⁶. Walk-along interviews have been used as methods of unders-

tanding gentrification but also patterns of urbanisation¹⁷. During their experiments, Oppezzo and Schwartz (2014, p. 1142) show how walking can activate creativity and reflection on ourselves¹⁸. Other researchers argue that *moderate intensity 'natural' walking relaxes executive functions and opens for a 'flexibility pathway' of associative thinking and ideation*¹⁹. But walking is also a means through which meanings about places of one's everyday life are produced. The walking practice contributes to feelings of joy or sadness, wellbeing or discomfort²⁰. The French philosopher Michel de Certeau, celebrated walking as a powerful mode of political resistance against planners and architects whose projects often tend to impose order on city spaces²¹. In fact, walking can be a quite useful method to gain insights into an urban space, its history, and practices of different groups during the process of heritagisation²². Furthermore, as Filipa Matos Wunderlich argues, walking rhythmicities produced by the differences of people engaging this ancestral practice, intercourse with places temporalities and transformed urban environments in sensed realities²³.

The Eleusis²⁴ experience

When back in 2017 the French architect Patrick Bouchain visited the town of Eleusis (Greece) in the context of preparations of the European Capital

of Culture candidacy, the territory deployed in front of his eyes was trickiest with numerous unshelled elements for the 'eye' of a visitor coming from abroad.

Alas, Bouchain, accompanied with his close friend and director of the circus arts' institution *le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde*²⁵ Eleférios Kechagioglou,

¹² Walking in Cities: Quotidian Mobility as Urban Theory, Method and Practice by Brown Evrick, Shortell Timothy
¹³ Andrew Goodman. Walking with the World: Toward an Ecological Approach to Performative Art Practice. In Klaus Benesch and François Specq (eds.) Walking and the Aesthetics of Modernity, 2016
¹⁴ Vergunst, J.L., & Ingold, T. (Eds.). (2008). Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315234250>
¹⁵ O'Neill M. & Roberts B. (2020). *Walking methods : research on the move*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315646442>
¹⁶ Idem
¹⁷ Walking in the European City Quotidian Mobility and Urban Ethnography Timothy Shortell, Evrick Brown
¹⁸ Give Your Ideas Some Legs: The Positive Effect of Walking on Creative Thinking
¹⁹ Sigmund Loland (2021) The poetics of everyday movement: human movement ecology and urban walking, Journal of the Philosophy of Sport, 48:2, 219-234, DOI: 10.1080/00948705.2021.1915148
²⁰ Lager, D. R., Van Hoven, B., & Huigen, P. P. P. (2021). Neighbourhood walks as place-making in later life. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 22(8), 1080-1098. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2019.1672777>
²¹ Middleton, J. (2011). Walking the city : the geographies of everyday pedestrian practices. *Geography Compass*, 5(2), 90-105.
²² Svensson, M. (2021). Walking in the historic neighbourhoods of Beijing: walking as an embodied encounter with heritage and urban developments. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 27(8), 792-805. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2020.1821240>
²³ Walking and Rhythmicity: Sensing Urban Space Wunderlich, FMRoutledge, 2008
²⁴ The name of the city is used in the text in two different ways, *Eleusis* is the name in ancient Greek while *Elefsina* is the name used in modern Greek. "Elefysiss", is derived from the noun "Eleusis", according to the Dictionary of the Modern Greek Language. Eleusis, meaning "arrival, coming", because the area was a gathering place for those who participated in the Eleusinian Mysteries.
²⁵ Based at the city of Bagneux in the Greater Paris region.

were already familiarised with other experiences in France on immersion methodologies with the objective to better understand an urban environment. Eleusis, this small port town close to Greek capital with a heavy historical past full of tales from Greek mythology, ancient remnants, traces of antiquity activities between classical Athens and the sanctuary dedicated to Demeter, and Kore (Persephone) evolves today as a noisy amalgam of cement buildings, industrial activities, shipwrecks and famous archaeological sites (such as the *Eleusinion* but also the prehistoric tombs of the "Western Cemetery" that

today witnesses of a past glory (such as the Kronos complex, the IRIS building, the ancient oil factory at the seafront...).

But this same landscape, celebrated by crowds of Athenians visiting Eleusinian Mysteries in the past and the archaeological site or the Aeschylia Festival nowadays, do not hide its scars, due to extensive exploitation of the landscape for the means of industrial development (like in the marble quarries).

The bet of hosting the European Capital of Culture under such uncertain conditions with weak public adminis-

aim of such a query was double: first, the act of walking was claimed by itself as an act of encountering the contemporaneous identity of the city. By the fact of being present in the city during the walks and associating people from different neighbourhoods, social groups, ages, professions, the team's will be to search a common shared narrative of what Eleusis could tell today about its story. The *ergastiria* (greek word for laboratories) were organised in an incremented way for three consecutive years (2021-2023). In the first years, walks were focused on various landscapes of abandonment before deepening the investigation in housing areas. Various forms of methods were tested; walking in small groups on different itineraries exploring the bold way in which cultures of minorities were impregnating housing space and investing on urban fabric form. Two are the important minorities in Eleusis, the Mikrasiates (first wave arrived after 1922) and the Pontians (arrived in late 1960s). Parallel to walks organised inside the spaces of their daily living, the team held out targeted interviews with some representatives of their communities in order to highlight how through history these minorities invested in housing, space and constructed networks of mutual aid. By the act of 'entering' on foot the neighbourhood of a community, participants (inhabitants from other areas of the city, members of the hosting teams, architects's team) were confronted to various forms of diversity, discussed at the closing up debates at the end of the day²⁷.

A first thing that has been highlighted was the many different ways of appropriating public space with little means. Observing the way in which houses were built on a modest but efficient typology of one storey with yard and collective passages at the backyards, offered not only a genius way of occupying



Walk in the neighbourhood of Mikrasiatika (refugees from Asia Minor) © Dimitra Kanellopoulou

has been identified as the tomb of "Seven against Thebes"). In a distance of only twenty kilometers from the city of Athens, Eleusis, was until the very recent years a marginalised zone, reputed for its dominant industrial landscape, the constant degradation of the environment, the occupation of the coastal line from port and refinery activities. From the celebrated past of flourishing industry of the beginning of the 20th century some buildings remained until

tration staffing and chronic financial crisis of local authorities and Greek state, was certainly a courageous one but worth making. By the success of the announcement of the hosting of European Capital of Culture, a small team of architects arrived on site for the first time in 2021²⁶ in order to question through outside walking laboratories the plural meanings of the city as expressed and created by the contemporaneous inhabitants of Eleusis. The

²⁶ The team was formed thanks to the initiative of Patrick Bouchain, Loic Julienne (from the French architecture firm *Construire* and Eleftherios Kechagioglou the director of *Le plus Petit Cirque du Monde*).

²⁷ The workshops were held each year during a period of one week and walking laboratories were conducted basically in the mornings while in the afternoons the team with participants were working on the activation of a public space.

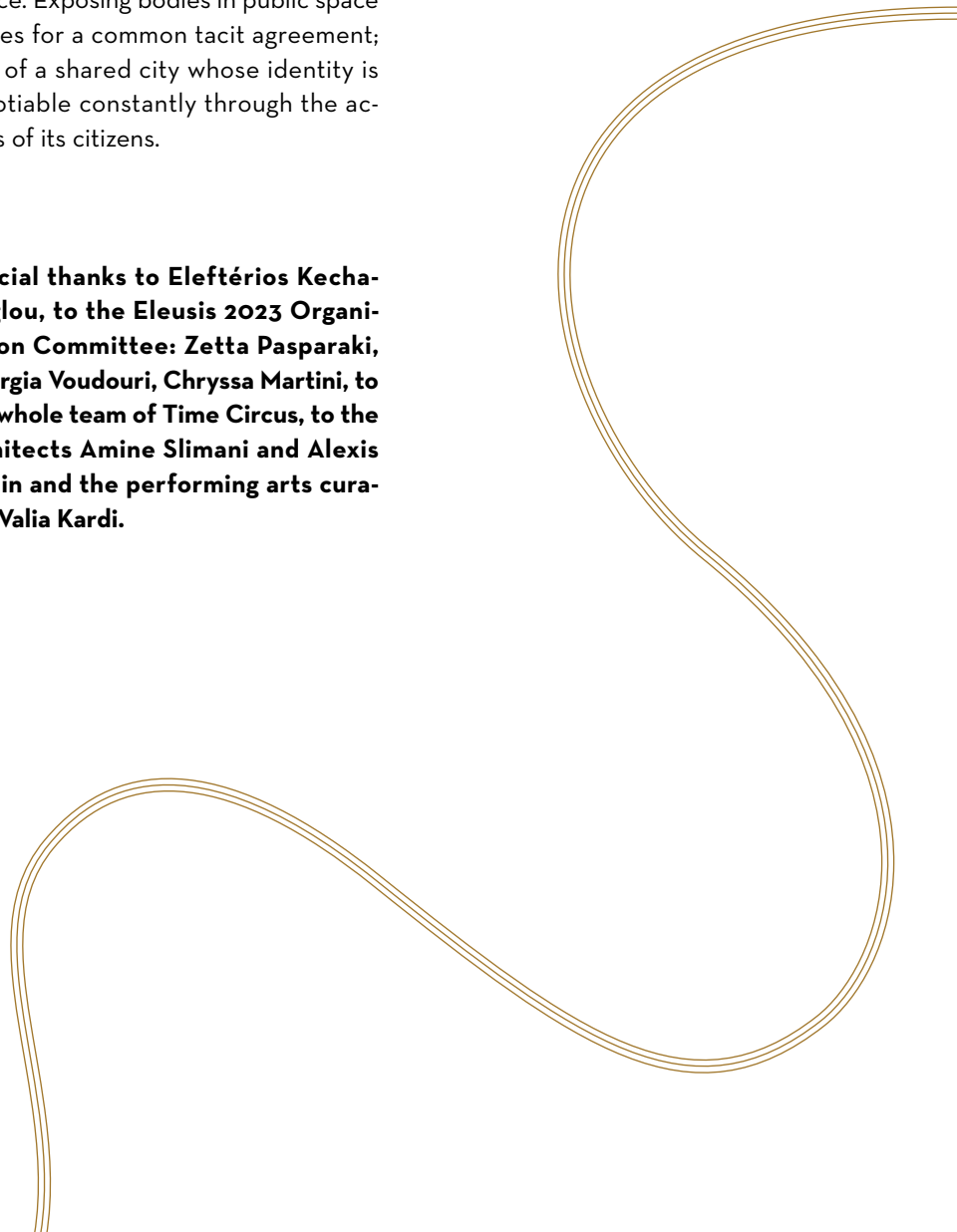
limited space of living but also offered various atmospheres during the day ; the small passages were transformed in open living rooms of chatting between neighbourhoods while the common roofs ensured structurally the complex of rudimentary houses built by earth bricks.

At a bigger scale, the city's history is bound with the diversity of its populations. Ethnic minorities arriving here for reasons of work shaped the urban environment with the means at hand. For some, proximity to industrial sites was the first factor of installation while for others, their illegal status obliged them to search land (not constructible) at the margins of the city. These various forms of occupying public space show a tremendously adaptive system of city's evolution.

At the present moment, cities have benefited from works on infrastructure that slowly change its landscape (squares refurbishment, seafront promenade, IRIS restoration...) As new public spaces emerge in Eleusis, debate is still open on the becoming of public space in a city where this subject was never in the epicentre of interests (neither for population or politics). However, during the European Capitals actions (mysteries), Eleusis public space revealed much malleable, rich in experiences and atmospheres, capable of welcoming various practices and publics. This malleability was maybe the result of an indeterminate identity and a sequence of unfinished cities which are much more precious in such complex conditions of governance and financing. In the second year of laboratories, a trivial residual space in a fragmented fabric, behind a supermarket, attracted our interest.

Walking in urban space was still an act of confronting diversity. The Eleusis experiment showed how various walks function like fissures revealing different normalities of the city but also like stitches bring together fragmented realities. Walking laboratories showed how various populations claim plural narratives of their city living. Moreover, the walks and acts of placemaking highlighted the margins of investment on social capital which by its turn can transform abandoned spaces into emergent community's life centralities. By the simple act of moving in urban space, the human body becomes the medium of a new reading of *urbanity*, not by looking at forms and functions but by emphasising on memories and temporality of practices that give both individual and collective meaning in trivial spaces. A bodily engaged environment is coloured by cultural dispositions, ways of belonging, social allegiance. Exposing bodies in public space invites for a common tacit agreement; that of a shared city whose identity is negotiable constantly through the actions of its citizens.

Special thanks to Elefthérios Kechagioglou, to the Eleusis 2023 Organization Committee: Zetta Pasparaki, Georgia Voudouri, Chryssa Martini, to the whole team of Time Circus, to the architects Amine Slimani and Alexis Gonin and the performing arts curator, Valia Kardi.



DIVERSE BODY/IES CHARTER

CIRCOSTRADA CHARTER FOR DIVERSITY

Introduction

The Circostrada Charter for Diversity is the result of a nearly year-long collective process between members of the Diverse Body/ies internal committee, Circostrada coordination team, and external experts working around questions of inclusivity, fairness, equity, and accessibility in the arts ¹.

Developed over the course of 2022 and 2023, the Charter sets parameters for the network and its affiliate members to promote a more inclusive ecosystem for artists and professionals working in our field. This means proactively addressing the complex and interwoven forms of structural, institutional, and systemic discrimination against groups and individuals in our society and how they may manifest in the network's activities - especially with regards to age, disability, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation, pregnancy and parenting, race, religion and belief. In the context of a global reckoning around many systems of oppression, from the Movement for Black Lives, #metoo, and anti-colonial struggles, Circostrada will work to be in greater solidarity.

Circostrada stands strongly in favour of shared responsibility between all players from the field and will strive to foster solidarity, mutuality, and reciprocity among its international peers. The network wishes to engage in an open dialogue and to prioritise a "non-preachy" way of raising awareness and holding itself and others accountable. The suggestions and best practices presented in this charter are not conditional on participation in Circostrada activities and/or membership, but should be recognised and approved by all members, artists, festival organisers, participants, and other guests involved in the Circostrada programme of activities.

As a European network, Circostrada values and uplifts the great diversity of contexts and environments of all its members. Further, it acknowledges that the legacy of colonial geopolitical histories continues to produce power disparities, unconscious biases, and other ongoing injustices in and beyond Europe.

The network will be vigilant not to discriminate against any non-European members for ecological reasons, and will continue to invite people from the Global South to travel in order to provide equal opportunities.

The Circostrada Charter for Diversity is a work in progress. The internal Diverse Body/ies internal committee will meet once a year to assess the Circostrada network's progress according to the stated objectives and to enrich the content of the charter.

¹ A special thanks is owed to Makarena Marambio for her expertise and Nick Zelle for his sharp eye.

1. Activating change

What to focus on:

- Creating a culture of care for all, and especially those who experience discrimination of any kind
- Providing opportunities to people from diverse gender, ability, racial, social, economic and religious backgrounds
- Challenging colonial and imperial legacies and the hegemonic power relations they produce within the cultural sector and institutions

What Circostrada will do about it:

- Provide training for Circostrada members on the subjects of IDEA²
- Hire a fairness and anti-discrimination representative within the network
- Empower leaders from diverse backgrounds through mentoring programmes

2. Visibility of under-represented groups

What to focus on:

- Raising awareness of the visible and invisible discriminations present in our society against individuals, regarding age, disability, gender expression and sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief
- Addressing the fact that the cultural sector at large is partly responsible for the under-representation of certain groups, and that it must invent new paradigms

What Circostrada will do about it:

- Work to create spaces within the network where members feel safe and supported enough to voice their needs and be heard
- Uplift non-dominant, non-hegemonic aesthetic standards in the arts with regards to the intricacies and particularities of cultural expression
- Encourage and remove barriers for discriminated groups of individuals to participate in our programmes and activities

3. Accessibility

What to focus on:

- Affirming that disabled people have the right to equal treatment, equal respect and equal access to cultural activities and employment opportunities
- Advocating for more accessible information, venues, and infrastructures in the cultural sector
- Acknowledging and confronting the often ableist norms for the body in contemporary circus and outdoor arts

What Circostrada will do about it:

- Create and enforce accessibility guidelines to share with our event partners
- Work to make Circostrada's activities accessible for all kinds of disabilities with the help of experts, including those within the disability community.
- Advocate for these issues on a European level, together with other networks and cultural institutions.

4. Fair and inclusive event curation

What to focus on:

- Raising awareness that cultural events can reflect the normative expectations of society and contribute to the systemic marginalisation of individuals and groups
- Amplifying the diversity of representations and narratives in international events
- Acknowledging that true diversity and inclusion can only occur in the context of safe meetings and interactions

² Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility

What Circostrada will do about it:

- Consider sociological biases as a factor when designing all events and programmes
- Create curatorial materials to contextualise events within the local culture (city/region/country)
- Contextualise the advocacy work done on-site on IDEA issues
- Support disabled artists financially, include them upstream in the production process, and take account of their specific needs in terms of budget

5. Fair and inclusive international mobility

What to focus on:

- Understanding inequalities in mobility due to visas, passports, and international agreements, as well as the fact that travelling as a trans, nonbinary person can be problematic
- Taking seriously the rise in nationalism and nativism, including in Europe, and how this impedes international cooperation
- Accepting the responsibility for international networks to facilitate transnational encounters and unity beyond national borders
- Interrogating how networks like Circostrada may be complicit in the inequities around international mobility

What Circostrada will do about it:

- Endeavour to select panel guests above and beyond considerations of production difficulties, financial costs, and ecological impact, in order to guarantee fairness of opportunity for participation in an international field
- Include in its upstream production costs any expenses related to visas and anticipate any pitfalls that may occur due to mobility discrimination
- Provide extra support and care to trans, nonbinary persons when travelling to ensure their safety

6. Inclusive communication

What to focus on:

- Taking seriously the power of precision in language to include, exclude, empower groups
- Creating communication materials that cater to a linguistically and culturally diverse public
- Advocating for the recognition of different needs in terms of visuals, languages, and formats

What Circostrada will do about it:

- Be as precise as possible with language, and avoid defaulting to umbrella terms or making assumptions about people's identity or experiences
- Update the network's website and graphic design to a colour-blind friendly palette
- Adapt the network's website for the hearing impaired
- Use inclusive writing in all communication material, as well as Circostrada's resources

7. Human resources

What to focus on:

- Ensuring correlation between mental health and work discrimination against individuals, regarding age, disability, gender expression and sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief
- Creating alternatives to the often discriminatory labour conditions within the cultural sector, including the reliance on volunteers and hiring of low-paid staff

What Circostrada will do about it:

- Design recruitment rules that promotes transparency and neutrality, to avoid as much as possible discrimination
- Advocate for dignity at work and fair work conditions within the Circostrada team
- Provide safe spaces for feedback and demands for Circostrada staff members

Annex

Guidelines

- Gender guidelines
- Dyslexia Guidelines
- Easy-to-read guidelines

Training

- British Dyslexia Association provides training
- Training from a learning-disabled perspective

Other

- On the Idea of rest and burnt out
- Europe Beyond Access
- Time to Act report
- Not a toolkit! Fair collaboration in cultural relations: a reflAction