

Protokoll Tischgespräch / transcript of table talk / procès-verbal de la conversation :
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Dein Körper entscheidet, wie du Kunst erlebst.
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Mit / with / avec: Jess Curtis

Present:

J.C. group discussion leader,

11 participants, anonym, referred to as letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G, I, J, K, L

1 person documenting the discussion

J.C. suggest that that the group spends first 5 min broken into smaller groups of 3 participants, discussing the topic and issues risen by it, guided by personal experiences of perspective, memory, experience of pain... The aim is to mobilize the discussion in the minds of participants, who will, each take turns in presenting their ideas to the whole group afterwards.

Group 1 - J.C. + C + B

Group 2 - L + A + K

Group 3 - D + J + E

Group 4 – F + I + G

Groups start discussing lively. Words and parts of the sentences that can be repeatedly heard are:

in my personal experience, body, my body, how I experience my body, how I experience in my body, what is a body...

J.C. has a hard time stopping the participants, obviously very engaged in their discussions within the small groups.

Once **J.C.** succeeds, he suggests they carry on with the plan using an access practice – each participant will be given 3 min to introduce themselves (by giving a brief visual description of themselves) and to present their ideas on the topic. This brief visual description is meant to show what each of the participants thinks is valuable, visual

information to give about themselves and how ones perception of oneself is in relation to how the world (the space, the room one enters in, the others) might perceive them.

J.C. starts by introducing himself as a white, cisgender male, from San Francisco with wild, white hair, glasses, big earrings and tattoos, wearing a scarf and a sweater.

J.C. is interested in questions of visual experience, like: what does visual experience mean? and how to dislocate visual experience?.

He explains, how depending on the composition (one's placement within the room) everyone has a different experience of things happening in that room. Referring to the performance piece "The Way You Look (at me) Tonight", he goes on explaining how the idea of examining divers perspectives through physically diverse involvement is incorporated in the work and that he likes to create work reflecting on how it is to experience it, from the seats in the center, as well as from every other seat. He suggests that in creating, it is useful to locate one's experience in one's own body, but having different perspectives in mind. By doing so, one can be aware of how work can function on different levels, what are the choices that can be made and how one might filtering work through their own experience.

C introduces themselves as redhead, with a crooked back, walking with a crutch, moving like a duck, wearing colorful, performative clothing to match their art installation.

C explains that their hard hearing makes them have different hearing experience. They are also often forced to change their perspective, as, due to their backache and getting physically tired quite easily, they have to stand up and stretch their back. They are convinced people find that weir.

B lives in Sweden, is tall, very tall, has big feet and small nose and strong facial expressions –describes themselves as looking scary. Convinced that that is why some choreographers don't like to work with **B**.

B works in an inclusive dance company, often asking themselves how does the audience experience their work depending on their own bodies. From personal experience **B** knows that having very sensible hearing, disrupts their concentration. Being in audience of the "The Way You Look (look at me) Tonight" performance made **B**, who was sitting in

one of the seats on the stage and had experienced physical contact with performers, reflect on the different experiences by audience members sitting elsewhere in the room.

L communicates that they have to invent their description (they need to do so due to the fact the guidelines and definitions we use in describing ourselves are all constructed by society) – a middle-aged person with disability, has grey hair, wearing a brown jacket. Explains that its is hard to define if our bodies determine what our experiences are, as we cant say that our bodies are actually there or are imaginary concepts. What we know and see us as is defined by the contexts and the culture around us. Therefor is impossible to do a precise mapping of the body, as there exist so many different cultural spaces and contexts.

A starts by saying that they had a few names in their lifetime. Depending on the profession (a doctor, a dancer...), they chose or were given a different name.

A is building up a thinking and practicing platform, with a goal to perceive the body beyond the science and medicine and by that expanding the definitions of what body is.

A wishes to have a fluid body, to open their body up and be a plant, be an animal and all within their own body.

A expresses their awareness of how exterior identity is very relative and is depending on the exterior perspectives.

J.C. interrupts quickly to introduce the notion of recontextualizing as a way to deepen **A**'s last statement. He asks everyone to reflect on the question: how one might rightly or wrongly see them when they enter a specific space and what people with no access don't get to see.

K introduces herself as a white, cisgender woman with blondish hair and green eyes, who is 1.60 tall and is a wheelchair user. **K** wears a blue cardigan and is a theater worker hoping to find more fluidity. **K** is convinced that art influences our body experience as much as our body is experienced by art. As a performer she can witness audience and performers connecting. This connection is an empathic experience that can physically influence the body (influence the heartbeat, for example).

As an audience member she can witness her body, her impairment influencing the creative work. She continues by asking what body is and where body ends, and whether

in defining it we should consider body and mind as disconnected? In order to explain **K** uses the example of the performance piece “The Way You Look (at me) Tonight” that she attended as an audience member saying that starting to feel pain during the performance affected her experience of the show. But her knowing that by moving she might interrupt the show influenced her decision to endure the pain.

D describes themselves as dressed in black, giving mention to their new haircut and their new glasses. **D** runs an inclusive theater and is nervous speaking English. The length of a theater piece is the first thing **D** wants to know about a show. **D** is also more likely to pick a seat in the last row or on the sides of the theater hall in order to have a view of the audience that, in their opinion, is a big part of the show contributing to the feeling and the atmosphere. A quick way in which **D** practices a view from a different perspective and experiences another feeling of a show is by taking off their glasses. Another way for **D** to gain different perspective is to sit close to a person with disability and try to sense, observe, feel and learn from their reactions (movements, expressions, sounds) while experiencing a show.

J introduces herself as a cisgender woman, who lived in Zürich since ages. She wears a pullover with stripes and falls asleep right away if she doesn't like a show. As someone who runs an institution she feels like she wants to think about the smallest things, every detail in order to improve it. She wants to create a ‘third place’ for the visitors of her institution, a place like home but also something else. By making sure that there is food for the visitors who came to watch the show right after work, she wants to show her empathy as a hostess. So next to lights, architecture and other ‘obvious’ concerns of an institution she wants to focus on every detail and she hopes to achieve that by being open to new situations, all the time, throughout the whole institution.

E describes themselves as a director, wearing a black pullover and colorful jewelry – convinced that color is needed to lighten up every situation. Saying that, **E** wonders if her description of color would resonate with the blind person, since they might have a different concept of color. But quickly **E** added that once, in a conversation with a colorblind child, the child described their toy as ‘colorful as every color of the rainbow’. **E** works backstage, listening to the needs of the members of her association and working on making things better. That is why **E** is convinced that when seeing a performance they

strongly experience it on a physical level and wonders how would be possible to experience it on a more intellectual level. At the same time **E** would like not to make this distinction and overcome the idea of the separation between the two experiences.

F identifies himself as a white male, without a beard, wearing blue, having blue eyes and salt and pepper hair color.

F explains how as an observer and audience member he chooses to be safe, usually sitting in the back when watching a performance. He explains this situation and experience as intimate and the feeling of vulnerability makes him want to keep the control over it.

On the other hand, when in a role of an art maker, poet and performer, **F** likes to break rules, and losing control is a decision in which he enjoys and feels comfortable in.

I describes himself as a white male, with a bit of a beard, short hair and blue eyes, wearing jeans and a scarf. **I** is a performer that leads an inclusive theater company. In his opinion performing means breaking the walls. In reference to the performance piece “The Way You Look (at me) Tonight” he describes that his decision to sit in front (on the stage) was influenced by him feeling safe and feeling sure he will be good taken care of. He claims that experience of empathy is crucial in theater practice and creative process; it is catharsis that we are not necessarily aware of but it is a transforming experience. For him that is art, it is game of art, made of many sensations and depending on many things. It is not science and that’s why it is an experience that passes through the body and is hard to explain. In order to try to explain, **I** uses an example of a friend, who describes a pleasant theater experience by saying “I slept good in this performance”.

G wears a blue sweater with big stripes and identifies himself as a middle-aged male. He talks about how he was “involved with his body” his whole life by being a performer and then director of a company and a curator. He admits that he never thought about the topic in this way, saying that body is just one small part of a much larger contexts.

Before the end of the discussion **J.C.** suggests to summarize once again the most important points:

1. What is a body?

Is there a body?

How we experience our own body?

Where does body start and where does it end?

Up to which point we get to define our body and from which point it is defined by other bodies, context, society, situation?

2. Empathy?

Where and how is our experience in relation with other experiences? We have to be aware that we all bring something to the table.

3. Relationality?

The things not only exist in between ontological centers but also between them.
Things happen and exist in relations in in-between spaces.

Just before the time is up **A** asks **G** a question

A is wondering how come **G** danced his whole life but claims not to have ever perceived his performance though his body.

G answers by saying that he was too busy with his body his whole life to be able to ask himself that.