

**Protokoll Tischgespräch / transcript of table talk / procès-verbal de la conversation : Menschen mit Behinderung machen spannendere Kunst!**

**Mit / with / avec:** Claire Cunningham

03.05.2019, 11.00-12.00 Uhr

**CC, identifying as disabled, artist, hosting the round (CC)** Welcome & introduction: work with a partner to get us talking. First exercise: Answer the question Tell me something you love? repeatedly – one minute. Second exercise: Answer the question Tell me something you love about work by disabled artists? – one minute. Third exercise: Tell me something that excites you? Jede\*r spricht in ihre\*r/seiner jeweiligen Sprache.

**CC** We take another five minutes to come back to our topic and the question whether disabled artists make more exiting work. And we actually leave a few questions aside, e. g. What does excitement actually mean? And so forth. I myself in my practice started to ask this question: What is so specific about our work?

So I am speculating that the specificity comes through the lived experienced that goes along with higher attentiveness time and energy wise. So by following this question I want to understand how this attentiveness manifests in my work. And that goes along with questions about how we are trained in art education programs. Because most of the skills one is learning in those programs are about attention, spatial awareness, presence and so forth. So let's return to the question and discuss in pairs this question: What might be specific about works by disabled artists?

**Protokollant (PR), temporär nicht behindert, identifying as ally** Ich komme ins Gespräch mit **NA**, einer in D lebenden, nicht behinderten Frau, die im Kulturbetrieb tätig ist und sich für die Ausrichtung einer solchen Tagung interessiert. Sie arbeitet seit vielen Jahren in der Ausbildung von Menschen mit kognitiven Behinderungen. Im Gespräch geht es um Individualität:

**NA** Wenn es aufgrund bestimmter Einschränkungen keine Möglichkeit gibt die Form [bzgl. des künstlerischen Ausdrucks, Anm. **PR**] adäquat zu kopieren, zwingt das dazu sich den individuellen Möglichkeiten zu widmen. In seinem Ausdruck eine eigene Sprache zu entwickeln. Dabei sind jene, für die ich mich besonders interessiere, die, die es nicht wie alle machen.

**PR** Wie würdest Du Individualität genauer beschreiben?

**NA** Im Einklang mit den eigenen Fähigkeiten verborgene Talente freischaufeln. Bei meiner Arbeit ist mir aufgefallen, dass Menschen mit kognitiven Einschränkungen oft 'wahrere' Sachen sagen. Was sie ausdrücken ist noch nicht so überformt wie bei mir. Ich habe mir beim Lernen auch Normen angeeignet, die mich disziplinieren. Durch die Behinderung ist diese Selbstzensur weniger stark. Deshalb ist es nicht zwingend die spannendere Kunst, aber es ist wichtig, sich die Frage zu stellen, was wir daran spannend finden.

**PR** Warum ist es wichtig sich diese Frage zu stellen?

**NA** Weil die Kompetenz [von Menschen mit Behinderung, Anm. **PR**] so lange in Frage gestellt wurde. Zum Beispiel gibt es weniger Ausbildungsmöglichkeiten für Menschen mit Behinderung und das hat etwas mit einer bestimmten Auffassung von Behinderung zu tun.

**AP** I want to open the discussion here.

**A woman in a dark green blouse, identifying as disabled artist (DG)** We talked about different timing. And that seeing other dance bodies on stage makes us think of different bodies. This adds to diversity; by seeing this bodies in a non judging way. And it is powerful to go on stage and say I am a dancer, you [the audience, note **PR**] can see me and watch my inner dance and I might not even move physically and to give a shit about dancing [in a conventional way, note **PR**].

**Person with short hair, identifying as queer, disabled and artist (QP)**

When talking about form, all the performance practices are made by and for nondisabled bodies. When disabled artists put themselves to those practices they are dismantling these practices. It's radical practices for free, if we are having them celebrated and empowered.

**The neighbour sitting next to QP (NQ)** It's a continual learning.

**DG** communicating to QP I am nodding.

**NA** What is it that we do find exciting about disabled art? Is it because it is new to us? Or is it because we see the difference in the mainstream? Or do we find it exciting because we don't know it?

**Woman in a red blouse with white flowers (RF)** Because I have an invisible impairment this art remains particular to me. And I respond more emotional. What happens if this changes, if I get more adapted to it, does the opening notion still count?

**A man wearing glasses and a white cap (WG)** It is the empowerment that is exciting to see, this won't disappear because it is socially relevant. It is a diversity that is not competitive.

**QP** I don't agree. Coming from the UK, I can say that there is a hierarchy amongst disabled people. That those who are visibly impaired get more attention. The goal is that this doesn't happen, but there always remains this tension.

**WG** To be part of a struggle, to question these hierarchies is what excites me and I agree that especially on the level of funding there are hierarchies.

**A queer person, identifying as disabled (SN)** As a person that is invisibly disabled, coming for Germany, I struggle a lot with the term diversity. It is mostly about representation. If funding is given on the basis of criteria of how people look like, persons with invisible impairments still won't be funded. Only who fits in the norm of the model of a specific disability then, gets funded. There are certain groups that are underrepresented in this discourse.

**DR** I am a disabled person from Austria and have this strong desire to work as an artist. But it's not all my responsibility. Talking about culture and the social, we have to consider that those who fund us are from the medical system. When you have this and this disability you get this and this funding. You have to do a lot to get that money but you shouldn't be too disabled then to be good on stage. laughter But let's no go with these structures!

**QP** I completely agree and this reminds me on the International Blind and Visually Impaired Theatre Festival in Croatia. It was set up in 1948 [according to this [HP](#) the *Theatrical company of the blind and visually impaired New Life* was founded in 1946, the festival started in 1999, note **PR**] and is one of the oldest in Europe. It is a charity event and fund on tourist money from the city. But what they show is radical political stuff.

**CC** I wonder about contextualizing the work. The cliché among programmers is that disabled art is not interesting for nondisabled people. So how to create work that is relevant to everyone, e. g. we are all living lives that struggle with capitalism. How can we think of our work in those frames and make it available to curators? Like for instance my dialogue partner said, through the performance last night [The Way You Look (at me) Tonight, note **PR**], she gained a different understanding of queerness that she defined differently before she saw the piece.

**A woman with a brown scarf (BS)** I guess this is a new topic and about artistic production. I think what we learn from disabled art is that it has a political, social impact that can be transferred to other fields. We can frame the message wider than it is.

**QP** But do you see a risk of watering down all these different issues? To make those topics shallow in some ways by applying them to any other context?

**BS** To me the artistic point of view counts. If it is shallow the work becomes shallow too.

**QP** About the issue of capitalism, there are many similarities between disability and queer culture, e. g. that they bot got pathologized for so long. Now I see certain types of performances that had been mainstreamed, the norms and repressiveness that they originally criticized got normalized. The performances are not radical anymore. But there are other queer performers who comment on that. And also the work with disabled

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performers has changed. It is not enough anymore to have disabled performers on stage. There is always a tension in there that we need to use. We should claim more space but also address this tension.

**SN** We have to go beyond representation and empower disabled people who do their own work. Artists that are not casted or directed by nondisabled. But I want to go back to the question: To my mind disabled theater is about different perception, so we have to provide different accesses. This transforms the art making and this way of working/mode of thinking also includes the audiences differently.

**DG** We all come from different countries with different educational systems. And our privileges depend very much on our education. We have to keep that in mind, otherwise the pressure goes back to ourselves.

**WC** The talking and working on support structures is questioning notions of autonomy that are so deeply linked to our capitalist system.

**DG** E. g. professional experiences don't count as much as a paper or a degree.

**CC** Skill and knowledge have been framed and disabled art can reframe that. There are techniques [that are applied in the arts, note **PR**] and here are practices that don't fit the tradition of these specific techniques. But the experiences of disabled artists are valuable. And these fractions lead to questions such as what is power or what is knowledge.

**NA** And being able to communicate it.

**QP** It's about embodied knowledge.

**DG** Yes, and that we can teach our disability.

**CC** Closing the round