

Theatre as a way to inclusion



an international
reflection on the state
of theatre inclusiveness

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Introduction

The 'Theatre as a way to inclusion' conference took place on 4 March 2023 at the Centre of Inclusive Art / Theatre 21 in Warsaw as part of the "Be IN!(-clusive)" project. The aim of the event was to reflect internationally on the current state of theatre and its inclusivity.

The programme for the event was created by Justyna Lipko-Konieczna, Wiktoria Siedlecka-Dorosz and Justyna Wielgus. The conference speakers – creators and artists of amateur, alternative, and professional theatres, and representatives of non-governmental organisations, public and social cultural institutions as well as the academic community – are associated with various areas of theatre. People who perform on stage, direct, produce events, create theatre festivals, coordinate accessibility, work as theatre educators, run theatre groups and cultural institutions, coordinate and promote accessibility, animate local communities, undertake research activities and engage in artist training and artistic education shared their stories and experiences. Inclusion and its theatrical contexts were discussed both from the perspective of people with different types of disabilities and with different types of abilities.

These enumerations show how wide an area is covered by the map of issues related to inclusion in theatre. I believe this will help readers find in this collection contexts, challenges and themes of inclusivity that are close to their hearts. The variety of voices and stories presented shows that inclusion can be pursued through very different routes. Each reveals slightly different issues and challenges related to it. All the speakers work in the field of theatre, but they also invite us to look more widely, taking into account the social context, local conditions and, above all, the specificity of each human being.. The main thematic areas emerging from the conference are reflected in the titles of the different parts of the book:

Theatre – from compulsory therapy to a culture of care

This section contains texts that address the therapeutic aspect of creativity. They discuss how art can contribute to human development, pose the question about the consequences of identifying works of people with disabilities with therapy and indicate the transformations that have taken place in this field in the last thirty years in Poland.

'Crippling' the stage – representation on theatre stages

This section looks at issues related to the presence of people with disabilities on stage. How does this presence transform theatrical discourse? How does it influence the development of theatrical poetics? What questions does it pose to theatre makers and researchers? How does it affect audiences?

The responsibility of institutions

The voices collected here tell the story of how different types of institutions approach the issue of inclusion. On the one hand, they bear witness to how far they have come on the way to inclusion and share the practices they have developed; on the other, they draw attention to areas overlooked, not yet explored or only just visible on the horizon.

The publication closes with a text introducing the concept of the "3 IN" exhibition, which was the culmination – but not the closure – of the project. Indeed, the exhibition invites visitors into a creative dialogue and leaves them with questions about theatre created by people with disabilities.

As editor, I also want to invite the readers of the post-conference volume to this process of searching for their own ways to inclusion. Each text concludes with a set of questions that relate to its content and encourage the readers to relate the issues from the article to their own experience. One can think of them as signposts, which, however, are not advice or a golden rule to follow – but can trigger a process of independent exploration. This is shown by the stories of our speakers, who, at different stages of their life journeys, faced the unknown, started to ask themselves questions and think about the answers, but also actively searched – often by trial and error – for a way out of a dead-end situation and for an appropriate solution. We hope that learning the perspective of the conference participants and facing the questions will result in proposals for new and innovative theatre activities and will be a step towards creating a society where there is room for everyone. Step by step, because that is what being on the way and reaching goals is all about. The "Be IN!" project is coming to an end, but the journey towards inclusion continues and more and more people are joining in.

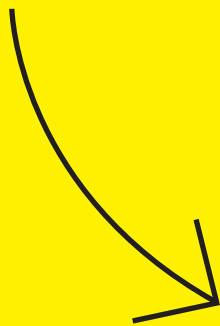
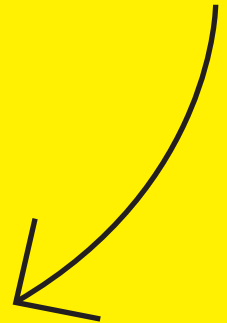
I could put a full stop here, but let me first share a personal reflection.

The diversity of the participants and their ways of using language also triggered a process in which I – as the editor of the volume – started to ask myself questions. Working on this collection not only presented me with challenges of a stylistic or compositional nature, but above all made me re-consider my role when working with a text authored by another person and ask myself about the limits of my interference. I began to wonder what a linguistic 'norm' actually is and to what extent I am striving to uphold it, and to what extent I am giving space to the individual expression of each author – especially when they reach for means far from the recommendations of dictionaries and language guides. Should I build a coherent collection of essays and to this aim postulate a stylistic form other than that in which someone shares their experience? In all this, what are my responsibilities to the readers? I have chosen to remain faithful to each person's communication style and preserve their linguistic idiosyncrasies, while trying to ensure that their intentions are clear to the audience. I hope that this individualised language will complete the picture of the diversity of people who create the field of inclusivity in theatre.

Katarzyna Piwońska

PART I

Theatre -
from compulsory
therapy to a culture
of care



Agnieszka Piasecka

About the journey from an international festival to a local theatre that cares about social change

As someone born in 1970, I came to know and love theatre in the 1980s. And it was both professional and amateur theatre, alternative, student and village theatre, stage song and sung poetry theatre, political theatre, puppet theatre and visual arts theatre... As a teenager I was addicted to watching theatre. I also played in the inter-school theatre Studio "P" run by Lucyna Sowińska in Toruń. At the time, the situation was favourable for young people interested in theatre: we travelled all over the country from festival to festival thanks to cheap train fares and squeezed into performances without tickets. Then, in smoky festival clubs, we had discussions with theatre directors, actors and researchers until the morning - these conversations mattered more to us than food, sleep, health or material things. The castle in Szczecin or the castle in Olsztyn and other iconic spaces were as familiar to us as homes.

The year 1989 was a breakthrough for me. I passed my high school exams and was admitted to university to study theatre as part of my cultural studies degree in Łódź. In the same year, Poland regained its freedom, but from my perspective, these changes did not initially mean anything good for culture. In the new system, there was no reasonable cultural policy, no funding, and cultural centres began to disappear from small towns. Until then, theatre had been my guide to the world of values, my companion in growing up and in the formation of my identity. After 1989, I gradually lost the support I had had in the art. The theatre of the early nineties increasingly rarely gave me the feeling of participating in something important or sublime that addressed

contemporary or personal dilemmas through references to literature, to images, to music. It no longer pointed the way, opened my eyes, broadened my horizons or inspired me to think or act. Sometimes it simply bored me or aroused distaste. It ceased to be a magnet for me. It ceased to be essential to me.

I didn't want to accept this. "Why am I studying theatre?" - I asked myself.

And then someone took me to the Studio for the Development of Creativity in People with Disabilities run by Professor Andrzej Wojciechowski at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. For many years, the university provided a place where people with learning disabilities could create. Classes were taught by Toruń-based artists, lecturers at the Nicolaus Copernicus University. The theatre was founded by Professor Marian Stępak. I saw a rehearsal of their amateur performance, and people who were truly committed - people who needed theatre to live, to overcome their weaknesses, to gain a sense of worth, fulfilment, satisfaction. Calling what I saw therapy through theatre seemed obvious and right to me at the time. What's more, the subject drew me in and I started to learn about similar theatres in Poland and, thanks to Professor Wojciechowski, also about theatres abroad. It was thanks to him that I became acquainted with companies such as Tartaar in Belgium, Maatwerk in the Netherlands and l'Oiseau-Mouche in France. I decided that the therapeutic function of theatre would be the subject of my MA thesis. This is how the foundations for my future professional path were built.

Together with my lecturers, I came up with ideas for practical activities related to the topics I was interested in: we organised academic sessions on therapy through theatre, workshops, and performances.... And finally, in 1995, in collaboration with the Polesie Art Centre, we established a festival known today as the International Biennial Theatre Meetings "Therapy and Theatre". The festival has been held in even-numbered years since 1996. Many people were greatly enthusiastic about the festival events, especially in the first years, and the atmosphere of these events helped me regain the feeling that theatre can still be important.

The festival featured companies from Poland and abroad. I noticed one important difference at that time. The artists with disabilities who performed in Polish ensembles said "Theatre is my life". Theatre was the essence of life, a motivation to live, a sign of presence in social life. In contrast, those performing in foreign companies shied away from the therapeutic function of theatre. "Theatre is my job," they said proudly. The stunning aesthetics of

many of the performances presented at the event suggested to me that they were not about therapy per se - or perhaps they were not about therapy at all? In order to look for an answer to this question, in 1999 we organised a conference at the University of Łódź titled "Theatre by people with disabilities. Therapy or Art?". The discussions were very intense.

Is theatre by people with disabilities therapy or art? Today I would not ask such an unnecessarily provocative question. With the perspective of time, I see this is not a homogenous field of work: you will find those who use theatre in their work with people with disabilities both for therapeutic work and those for whom the aim is art in its own right. It is gratifying when the work of both results in performances in which the actors feel comfortable, show interesting stories, talk about important issues and convey emotions.

Many people at different stages of life benefit from therapy. There are thousands of types of therapy and so they can respond to different needs. But at the same time, many people do not need any therapy to live. The same is true in the world of theatre-making by people with learning disabilities. Some are primarily concerned with therapy through theatre. Others create communities of artists whose primary (yet not the only) goal is to create aesthetically pleasing performances, because their needs are different - they want work, community, art, creation, professional and personal development. Something other than therapy. The third group are activists who make socially engaged art. Perhaps behind this is the need to care about different things: the world, the country, people, relationships and education, animals or trees.... Or maybe we are not split into different groups at all? Maybe there is a bit of each of these groups in us? Maybe in different projects, they appear in different proportions?

The thesis that theatrical work by people with learning disabilities is always therapy - even though it appears to be wrong in the light of the arguments presented here - is still sometimes repeated. I consider myself a fan of both theatre and therapy. I believe that the two can be combined, as well as performing separately. My dream is that we reach the point where we no longer need this discussion since our diversity has been accepted. As a person who has been meeting and bringing together artists (professionals and amateurs, people with disabilities, children at risk of exclusion, elderly people, addiction therapy patients or prison inmates) at one festival for almost 30 years, I am fully aware that the work of none of the groups is "right", "standard", "exemplary" - each is the result of a very individual specificity, a tangle of different conditions and an attempt to respond to them.

On my own professional path, I have chosen to combine theatre and therapy. Since 2017, I have been working as a therapist and running the theatre "YES or NO?" with young people and adults with Down's syndrome. We operate under the auspices of the Dorotkowo Foundation in Toruń. It is important to us that therapy through art goes hand in hand with the highest possible artistic quality. I invite many artists to collaborate with me and support me in areas of creativity in which I do not have experience myself (e.g. screenwriter Inka Dowlasz, director Krystian Wieczyński, director Lena Alberska).

Just because we call ourselves an amateur and therapeutic theatre now doesn't mean it has to stay that way. Perhaps in the future we will become a professional theatre and a cultural institution. It depends on what happens in our company. Nowadays, the actors, who are also Dorotkowo's proteges, are provided with various types of therapy, training in many fields (barista, gardening, housework) and they also work. They achieve a high degree of autonomy and partial financial independence. Seven of the nine actors are employed under a contract of employment. The actors' parents do not participate in the work of the theatre to any extent; they are simply spectators and are happy to invite relatives to the performances, as they are simply proud of their children's achievements.

Teachers from schools in Toruń declare their willingness to participate in our performances. School communities are amazed by the artistic level and the original approach to the topic presented on stage. Teachers pass on information about the company to each other, saying that our work is worth getting to know, as it has a positive effect on educating pupils in the spirit of tolerance for otherness and respect for all people. Participation in culture no longer means only typical visits to schools. For our actors, performances on the stages of Toruń's cultural institutions and trips to smaller centres in the region have become a daily occurrence.

The Dorotkowo Foundation has a great understanding of the needs of our theatre company. Rehearsals take place at the Ajanta Development Centre, where we use a large and empty rehearsal room (the lack of distractors and furniture is very important for awakening creativity). The floor is pleasant to the touch and no one walks on it in shoes. As a result, no elements of contemporary dance or intuitive movement therapy cause any resistance ("You want to snuggle your cheek against the floor - nothing stands in the way"). Right next door is a nice room with couches - ideal for the so-called therapy rounds. It is also a great place to relax. Birthdays of

the ensemble members are celebrated in a room with a large table that can seat a dozen people for a cake. We also have additional small rooms - for working in smaller groups. Or in case someone needs to get support in private. A cloakroom, dressing room and theatre storage room are also at our disposal. These comfortable working conditions are our pride. We lease the space from a private landlord - having our own venue is still in the realm of desire....

However, the perspective of more than thirty years of working in the field of creativity of people with disabilities allows me to dream boldly. For I can happily say that my dream of the past is now our reality: we are witnessing a huge social change in the approach to artistic activity of people with disabilities; apart from therapeutic theatres, in Poland we have professional theatres that employ actors with disabilities; repertory theatres have opened up to actors with Down's syndrome, among those who facilitate the artistic work of people with disabilities there are people who understand the need for proper theatrical working conditions and are ready to fight for them despite adversities. Inclusion is happening - but it takes time, faith in the rightness of this path and the courage to dream that another reality is possible.

Questions:

1. What change in the context of art created by people with disabilities do I dream of in the long run? Towards what vision of reality do I want to direct my steps?

2. What can I do today - under present conditions - to get closer to this vision? What could be my first step towards it?

3. Who in my environment is an ally with whom I can work for change?



A photograph from the performance *Klub Cierpliwych (The Patient People's Club)*, written by Inka Dowlasz (with the participation of our actors) and directed by Lena Alberska and Agnieszka Piasecka. Photo by Aleksandra Spoczyńska, Dorotkowo Foundation.



A photograph from the performance *Klub Cierpliwych (The Patient People's Club)*, written by Inka Dowlasz (with the participation of our actors) and directed by Lena Alberska and Agnieszka Piasecka. Photo by Aleksandra Spoczyńska, Dorotkowo Foundation.



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Erdmute Sobaszek

Essential Theatre. Inclusiveness at Węgajty Theatre

Węgajty Theatre has been around for many years - you could call us theatrical dinosaurs. In my story I want to go back to the beginning of the 21st century: it was then that we started to discover areas that were new to us in the field of theatre work.

By then we had our venue, our theatrical language, our contacts, our themes, our own productions... We also had an idea that drove us: our theatre was to be a public place that was close to the community and had an impact on its surroundings. So we created numerous local projects: we worked with children, we organised dance events in the country, we tried to reach out to different groups. And yet something was missing.

We regularly came forward with various proposals to the nearby nursing home in Jonkowo - for example, we gave concerts and performed plays for the centre's residents. Its residents are people who are unable to live independently (mainly due to their age). The aura of the place disturbed and, at the same time, attracted us. It happened that the centre's residents would share their difficulties with us during the interval or after the event, and that was when we felt our powerlessness, because we did not know how to react and what to do about it. This was a breakthrough for us. We realised that we were coming to a place with an artistic programme, but we were not at all making direct contact with the people who live there. During the performance we are there for them, but are we with them? We leave the centre and forget their faces, they melt into a general image of the audience. We realised that after several visits to one place we had not established any interpersonal relationships with the residents.

This gave us food for thought and awoke in us a new need. We felt that we wanted to enter this facility not to present ourselves, as we had done up to that point, but to get to know its inhabitants - their experiences, their perspective. We didn't have a ready-made idea of the formula for this cooperation - it was born in the process, by trial and error. At the time, we simply

felt that something was calling us there. This action came from our own need to be with the residents of this place – the lack we experienced and a desire to fill it with close contact and interaction.

The inspiration for the first project came from the anonymous faces of the public – we wanted to put each resident in the spotlight. We decided that portrait photography would work best here. We invited the visual artist Izabela Pająk to work with us. We visited people and took photos. Beautiful portraits were created, but we still felt that this was not what we needed. We went in, talked, photographed and that was it.

The breakthrough in our relationship with the residents of the nursing home happened by accident. Professor Aldona Jawłowska asked if we could run a theatre workshop for a group of sociology students at the Węgajty Theatre. We have agreed to such proposals many times, but this time we made a condition, we said: “Ok, come, but we want something from you in return... We will involve you in a joint activity... Maybe we will organise a meeting for the residents of the nursing home, during which you will interview them?”. And so it happened. The students prepared interview scripts in which they invited the centre’s community to talk about their childhood and their relationship with their grandparents. The event at the nursing home started with our short show with a dance, and then we asked the residents to take part in the interviews. And suddenly we noticed how the almost motionless faces of the audience, became animated and turned into the faces of the participants. People were inviting the students into their rooms and talking to them face-to-face about their personal issues. This is a very simple thing to do, but we at the time did not yet know the power of conversation! A collection of recordings emerged from the interviews, and for us it was an amazing experience because we heard these people’s voices for the first time. They were speaking from and about themselves. Since then it was clear to us that we wanted to invite these people to make theatre together.

Wacław Sobaszek chose the text of Stanisław Wyspiański’s *The Wedding (Wesele)* as the basis for our joint activities. The theme of this piece rhymed with how we saw our task: reconciliation within society, bringing together groups that had hitherto functioned on different levels. We liked the structure of the piece: it is actually a series of one-on-one meetings between characters in an intimate atmosphere – we associated this with the atmosphere of interviews conducted by students. So we formed pairs consisting of one person from the theatre and one person from the nursing home.

In practice, working together proved to be a great challenge. We were discovering what ‘life behind the wall’ in a care institution is all about: how thin the line between care and oppression can be, how the internal hierarchy translates into communication. We observed a whole system of micro-gestures and micro-behaviours that built up and maintained this internal balance of power – making sure that whoever is at the bottom knows that they are supposed to be at the bottom. Both sides reproduced this system: it happened in small details, in glances, in language. What’s more, we noticed that when we entered this system from the outside, it was not at all easy to oppose it and act on other principles. It was difficult for us to find a different language in our day-to-day contact than the one we had previously used. It was difficult to maintain loyalty to the institution and its people at the same time. How to behave when, during a dance, people on wheelchairs suddenly start to disappear, because the caretakers of the institution according to the schedule of the day take them back to their rooms without a word of comment or a chance to say goodbye. What to do then? We are guests of the institution and at the same time we want to bring a breath of fresh air. When to be polite and courteous, and when to protest? Before we got there, we didn’t anticipate that these kinds of choices would be part of our work on the performance.

The relationship between the residents themselves also turned out to be a major challenge. At the beginning, we were not aware of the internal web of conflicts. At the first rehearsal, we could not work with the whole group, because some people refused to work with those with whom they had some kind of history. We heard: “If X is in the group, I won’t be in it”. For this reason, the earlier decision to work in theatre member-resident pairs made it easier for us to deal with the internal tensions. However, there was a growing concern about how we would connect the emerging scenes. This was the first time we had met in a shared space to see what the developed fragments merged into. This experience proved to be a natural bond for our group. The scenes formed the nucleus of a future performance and everyone recognised that we had built this sense together. From then on, the residents of the centre were willing to participate in joint rehearsals.

During the rehearsals for *The Wedding*, it was not only the residents of the facility who changed their attitude towards themselves – we as a theatre were born again. The theatrical activities at the nursing home, carried out in parallel to our “regular” theatrical activities, were given the name “Essential Theatre”. Undoubtedly, the theatre rehearsals were essential for and needed

by the people living behind the wall; they filled an important gap in their lives and took on a therapeutic significance. But it was also we who needed this theatre. We were gradually discovering what it was like to work with people whose situation was completely different from ours. This opened up the possibility for us to see a different perspective on reality. Participating in their struggles, in their daily heroism, was an experience that changed us. I feel that it gave me strength that I can still draw on today.

The Wedding was followed by other plays. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream (Sen nocy letniej)*, we took on erotic themes - important to the local community and not necessarily present in the approach of the institution. In *Street of Crocodiles (Ulica krokodyli)* we took on the theme of disappearance. Schulz describes how an old father, no longer fitting in with his surroundings, transforms into a crab, eventually disappearing altogether. It reminded us of the silent almost nameless passing away of the residents of the Nursing Home. In the performance *Ubu the King, or the Poles (Ubu król, czyli Polacy)*, we spoke for the first time about the political situation in the country.

Such theatre proved to be needed by the audience as well! The performances were particularly important for the whole group. The ones that took place in the nursing home allowed us to show ourselves to the local community, to become known to its members. The performances on tours and the conversations with the audience after the shows provided an opportunity to go out into the world with our story and mission, to a different audience. Now these were the residents of the nursing home who were the creators, who were trying to connect with their audiences. And this encounter - a conversation in which we give each other time and attention, ask each other questions, listen to each other's answers - is for me the quintessence of essential theatre - a theatre that was created out necessity.

Questions:

1. Who in our environment do we want to get to know better?

2. What can we do to change the vector from creating for someone to creating with someone?

3. How can our actions be beneficial for members of the community we live in? What role do we want to play in it?

4. What do we know about those who know us? Who do they think we are?

5. What can we do to get to know the people and groups around us? How can we use creative tools to do this?

6. How does contact with the community in which we act change us? What do we learn in this relationship?



A photograph from the performance *Wesele (The Wedding)*.
Photo by Jarek Poliwko.



A photograph from the performance *Wesele (The Wedding)*.
Photo by Jarek Poliwko.



A photograph from the performance *Wesele (The Wedding)*.
Photo by Jarek Poliwko.

Karolina Wiktor

,,,, it's good that
I did a play
YESTDRYA__yesterday,
Dyato_____today
I'm less scared,,,,

Good morning to you. My name is Karolina Wiktor, I am 43 years old, my mother's name is Jolanta and my father's name is Leon, and I was born in Konin.

I introduced myself in the same way during the performance *Wypróbuj przyszłego magistra* (Try out the future Master's Degree holder) by the Sędzia Główny (Chief Judge) Group, which I founded together with Aleksandra Kubiak.

Yesterday we were a group - that 'yesterday' lasted nearly ten years, in which we created around 80 performances. Today I am acutely aware of the importance of our activity in the art space and in the social space. To illustrate the area of our interests, I divide them into three groups, which I will talk about in more detail below:

Static image

of compassion on the verge of meditation

Feminist image of beauty

in disgust, nudity and social transgression

Audience

an important creative factor

The static image of compassion on the verge of meditation manifested itself as we became a living sculpture that held the viewer's attention for a moment. We focused on understanding the body, the

breath and mindfulness. A frequent theme was our intimacy¹ or the inability of one of us or a close person². Our work challenged established patterns of thinking about visual artwork and performance art³. Challenging classical roles (especially female roles) has always been central to our work. This is why the Feminist image of beauty - in disgust, nudity and social transgression - has manifested itself in almost all our works. One can look at our activities from the perspective of art history⁴, but for us the essence has always been to situate our actions in specific social problems and to make them visible⁵.

Audience as an important factor - crucial in the creation of each performance: we placed ourselves, more than once, in the role of a tool that the audience could reach for in order to set a sequence of events in motion. On the one hand, we were stepping out of the pattern of the closed image and turning it into an act in which the viewer has an opportunity to act creatively. But on the other hand, we were revealing the dark side of human nature - that is, the mechanisms of power over another human being. This was the case in *Telegra (Tele Game)* broadcast at TVP Kultura. This performance, in the form of an audio-telephone game, allowed callers in the audience to give us instructions. Using a similar scheme, we created the performance *Wirus (Virus)* at the Teatr Rozmaitości - with the difference that the commands were given by the theatre audience to the actors. We acted as a transmission cable between the audience and the actors⁶.

Good afternoon to you. My name is Karolina Wiktor, I am 13 years old and come from Aphasia. In August 2009, an aneurysm in my left vertebral artery burst - causing a subarachnoid haemorrhage. After a week, another stroke followed, this time an ischaemic one - followed by Aphasia.

Having moved to Aphasia, I notice that it is governed by its own laws: time in Aphasia has a different dynamic, and fitness is worse, much worse. The body has curled up into a cocoon and has become necessary for my life, not for artistic creation.

1 The performance titled *Part V*, 2002.

2 The performance titled *Part XXIX*, 2005.

3 The performance titled *Part L* at the 2006 Berlin art fair.

4 Referring, for example, to Botticelli, Natalia LL's art, etc.

5 One example is our performance after the arrival of the Dutch Abortion Ship to Poland in 2003: at that time we gave birth to eggs for the first time and shared them with the audience at Gdańsk's Modelarnia.

6 Another performance from this series is *Part LXIV. I'm sad*. The difference between these performances is in the intimacy we create with a single spectator.

Summary of the Year for My Memory

For two months I negotiated life with death -- it turned out that the image of death is as ordinary as we are,,,, maybe that's why I don't remember anything,,,, while still in the building of the ministry of the great neurologist, I realised that I was in exile / forced emigration,,,, exactly at that time I was in a mental grey zone - "no passport, no luggage,,,, it took me two hours to say my date of birth,,,, but I did it - for one smile)**(

the first glimpse of life in aphasia is the same as in the real world -- only that the dimension is different - time is inversely proportional to space, i.e. the indifference of the mass of time and space is unequal to each other and to the psychophysical conditions of the a'phasian ,,,

"it was bad and uncomfortable", I was disturbed by reality.... in my new country -- prohibition is the main tool of coercion and reward -- I don't write, I don't read, I don't speak --

I have two legs and four arms -- what they are for ????

I quickly needed artificial joy to live -- "this will be my third life"- I said it on the snapshot to the minister of psychiatry ,,, pills gave me some perspective ,,, imagination is there-"you can start the programme already ,,, " tick-tock, tick-tock ,,, - how do you do it in the void ???? - I asked myself

- you can write blank reports from the void - I answered myself and became a correspondent from a'phasia - that's my first joy

,,,, don't be afraid ,,, don't be afraid to write ,,,

it's a good thing I did a play yesterday, I'm less afraid today -- there are two persons in Sędzia Główny Group -- the magic is multi-polar -- and art for art's sake is over....⁷

I'll ask again - if art for art's sake is over then _

_____ HOW

_____ TO

_____ CREATE SOCIALLY

_____ ENGAGED ART

_____ IN

_____ SUDDEN DISABILITY ????

7 An excerpt from my novel *Wołga przez Afazję (A Volga Road Trip across Aphasia)*.

I started with myself.... Rehabilitating myself 24 hours a day, taking medication (including artificial joy), I realised that since I had survived, I had something to do. Quite simply: I could help someone. But first I had to accept the sudden disability. I couldn't read about it because... I couldn't read. That's why I came up with an action aimed at intellectual and mental development, regardless of my health or profession. In 2014, we were able to create the Culture and Neuroscience Conference at Zachęta. Its aim was to bring together the two seemingly distant worlds of neuroscience and culture so that joint action could be taken to help people with neurological diseases and disabilities and their carers. These people should be an equal partner in any discussion and action taken. And such dialogues can result in development - not only of the individual, but also of society - and are an attempt to make bonds. We, who are neurologically disabled, have huge problems with cognitive functions - including writing, reading, counting, speaking - but we feel more than we know, so the encounter with different worlds develops each of the parties.

In 2016 I invited visual artist Iveta Pilarova, who has Multiple Sclerosis, to the second edition of Culture and Neuroscience. By creating new events, I become aware of new limitations, believing in development after all.

After a break, I'm going to open the Neurouse Foundation - I'm still keen to show different neurological diseases from the experience of male and female artists from different areas of culture. I want to create a cultural-scientific dialogue in which popular science talks are naturally combined with the exhibition, film, theatre.... It doesn't have to be mutually exclusive.

I work with ergonomic designers, 3D designers to jointly create solutions for patients (e.g. for people after a stroke who need to improve their arms or legs). We will also design aids for adults with cognitive difficulties (e.g. cognitive games). The ones on the market were created with children in mind - and this infantilises sick people.

What is most important in design? This collaboration must be based on a close relationship: patient-designer. In this way, a network of contacts can turn into a bond. A social design then begins to form, where one sick person can help rehabilitate another sick person. The designer together with the rehabilitator can assist each other and create new solutions. In Poland, there is not yet a deep understanding of interaction, but this can be attempted to change.

This is where my idea for the Letter Game came from - an interactive art installation in which gallery viewers can create words from incomplete

letters (cut out of wood) - from the Font of Absence, the letters of Aphasia. This allows participants to understand the problem faced by stroke patients with Aphasia. At the same time, they have the opportunity and the right to create everything from letter blocks on a table imitating a sheet of paper.

)))) Social Letter Puzzles))))

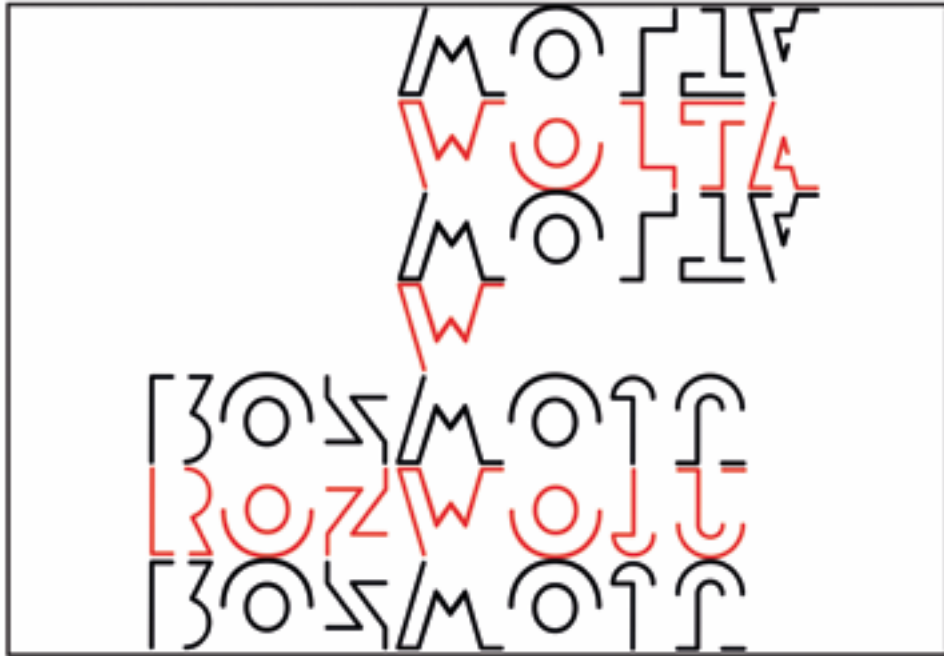
I, and those like me, operate in difficult, Afasian, conditions that do not correspond to the real world. That's why I created the film *Essentials of the Aphasian* in collaboration with Theatre 21/CSW - it's my testimony of crossing my own boundary, which I also share with others. Because our Volta in Development continues And it should be visible !!!!

Questions:

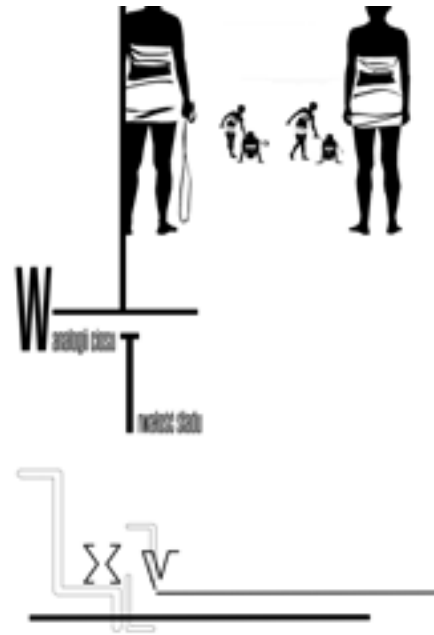
1. What development is possible in the face of/despite/thanks to the constraints that affect me? What new things are made possible by the constraints that affect me?

2. How can I share with others my experience of reality? What do I want to tell others about my world?

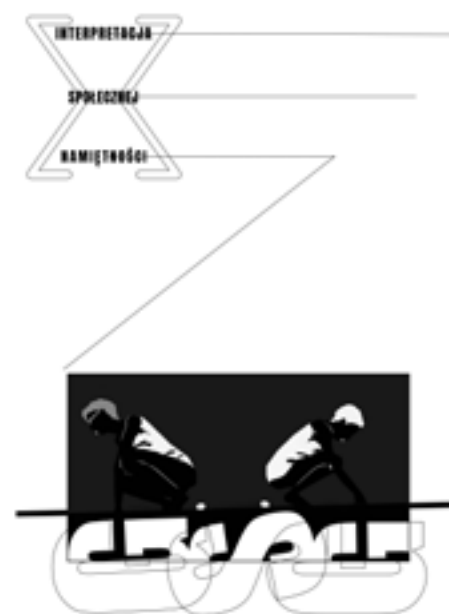
3. What areas of my 'yesterday' do I want to continue developing in my 'today' - with the means that are available to me today?



An inscription made up of seven lines written in the Font of Absence.
Graphic design: Karolina Wiktor.

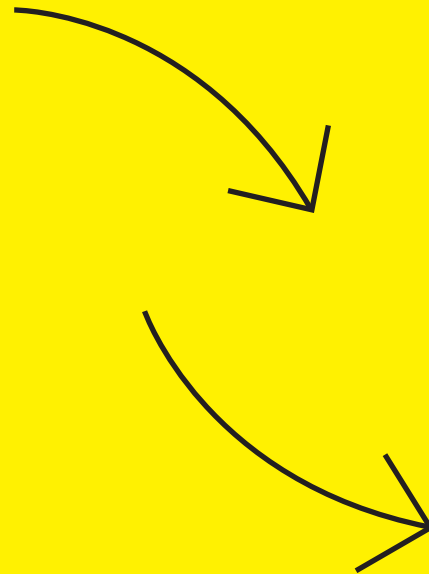


A print based on documentary photographs of the Sędzia Główny (Chief Judge) Group's performance *Part LXIV*. Graphic design: Karolina Wiktor.



A print based on documentary photographs of the Sędzia Główny (Chief Judge) Group's performance *Part LXIV*. Graphic design: Karolina Wiktor.

PART II



Cripping the stage -
representation on
theatre stages

Richard Conlon
and Katie Appleford,
Anna Brisbane,
Chris Pearce
from the Blue Apple
Theatre Company

A revolution with
a smile on its face

RICHARD: You should not trust actors. They tell you lies.

ANNA: You cannot trust writers.

KATIE: They tell you stories.

CHRIS: But maybe the stories are hiding real and important truths. These are not normal lies – these are...

ANNA: ...virtuous lies.

KATIE: ...honourable untruths.

CHRIS: ...righteous falsehoods.

RICHARD: I believe this: 'Theatre is a conversation, among friends, about matters of importance'

KATIE: I believe this: Theatre is a place where people get entertainment.

ANNA: I believe this: Theatre is a place where I can be creative with my friends.

CHRIS: I believe this: Theatre is a place where individuals can grow in confidence in a supportive atmosphere.

RICHARD: Can all these things be true in the same moment?

Blue Apple was created because there was a problem that needed fixing. Our two founders (mother and son) Jane and Tommy Jessop wanted to find an outlet for his creativity.

Tommy said:

CHRIS: "I want to act, I want to dance, I want to sing."

RICHARD: And the groups in his city, our city said:

ANNA: "No. Our group is not right for you."

KATIE: "No. You are not right for our group."

RICHARD: So they made their own. It started with two pilot sessions seventeen years ago – and fifty people came. If only we had one of those people here today...

ANNA: I was there. And I am still here. Still acting, still dancing, still singing. Still creating shows to make audiences laugh, cry and think.

I have spoken the words of Shakespeare and Dickens. I have shared my experiences with people from other countries. I have made my voice heard.

CHRIS: These voices were silent until the late 20th century, pushed to the edge, kept at the margins. Our company, and other companies in many countries, have all helped to bring this community from the shadows into the light.

RICHARD: Each company in this sector is unique. Each has a way of making work and showing work that is distinct. Some say...

ANNA: "We will not work with text – old fashioned plays are from history, we want to make contemporary theatre for a new age"

RICHARD: Some say:

KATIE: "The old forms of theatre were not made for our performers – we reject it."

RICHARD: We at Blue Apple say:

The stories that have lasted a hundred years or a thousand years may still have something to tell us, we might just need to find a new way to tell them.

ANNA: These stories, from the brothers Grimm, from Gogol (or Hohol as the Ukrainians call him), from Shakespeare – they belong to us all. It is our right to hear them and to tell them.

RICHARD: Each company, across the UK, across Europe, across the world is approaching the same problem in its own way. None of us are all right in our approach, none of us is all wrong. We are a young sector, still learning how to do what we do. Theatre is two thousand years old, we are just now making ourselves part of the big family of storytellers.

CHRIS: Our company faces uncomfortable compromises. On the same stage we will have the actor who...

ANNA: ...wants to be a professional...

CHRIS: ...standing alongside the person who is there...

KATIE: ...just for a bit of a laugh.

RICHARD: There will be people who will not remember a single line next to the person who will know...

CHRIS: ...every word, of every line, of every actor across the whole show..

RICHARD: Performers who don't speak with clarity but can move with power and grace.

Performers who struggle with movement but have great control over the language.

And performers who have issues with both.

And we have to make all of this make sense on one stage, in the moment. That shared experience in the room, never to be repeated. Something between rough magic, ritual and alchemy – something special and beautiful from normal materials.

ANNA: We are not politicians, but we are engaged in politics.

KATIE: We are not academics, but we are engaged in learning and teaching...

CHRIS: We are not social workers but we take care of people's place in society.

RICHARD: I have often joked that Blue Apple is 'the most social of social justice movements and the most civil of civil rights organisations' – maybe it is not so much of a joke.

ANNA: We are trying to change the world, one show at a time.

RICHARD: Each time we engage with the public at a festival, on the street, in a park.

CHRIS: We are trying to shift attitudes which have been in place for generations.

ANNA: And we work with big themes: family, power, revenge, reconciliation, home.

RICHARD: Just as life is a rich mix of many flavours, we try to create a variety...

KATIE: Perhaps something just to make you laugh in the middle of winter when you need it most.

ANNA: Or a hard hitting-show about living independently taken to the UK Houses of Parliament to help create policies for people just like us.

CHRIS: And the film about what we call 'mate-crime'...¹

RICHARD: The bird which we call a cuckoo will lay an egg in the nest of another bird, and with 'mate-crime' the criminal will pretend to be your friend,

¹ In this part of the dialogue there are references to two Blue Apple Theatre productions: *Living Without Fear* and *See No Evil*.

will help you spend your money, and then will use your flat for selling drugs... But when the police find out, the 'friend' is gone and a vulnerable person can be the only one left – alone and in trouble.

ANNA: And our film is used across the UK to raise this issue, open up debate. Not many laughs in that piece.

KATIE: And our cast are a rich mix.

ANNA: Down's syndrome, autism spectrum...a whole range of challenges which mean they would have been at the edge of civic life before, but now brought to the centre.

RICHARD: We work with volunteers, creative enablers.

CHRIS: And these volunteers walk step by step with the performers, encouraging the nervous ones and helping with difficult words, taking the heat out of angry situations and finally, importantly, never taking the attention away from our performers on the stage, staying just a step back, in the half light. Silent, stoic support.

RICHARD: Right now we are preparing another classic: George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

KATIE: It's about animals!

ANNA: No it's not.

KATIE: It's about a bad farmer who loses control!

ANNA: No it's not.

KATIE: It's about a bad pig who lets power go to his head!

ANNA: No it's not. It's about dictatorship in the middle of the 20th century.

CHRIS: Yes it is, but to be a classic surely it must say something about now, about us.

RICHARD: It's about what it means to be excluded, oppressed, pushed out of civic life. It's not about animals, it's not even about the Tsar or Stalin. It's about us and whether you have a role in your society.

CHRIS: Whether you can have an education?

ANNA: Have a job?

KATIE: Have a vote?

RICHARD: The world turns slowly. The arc of the history is long, but it bends toward justice. Change takes a long time, but it does happen. And it doesn't change without ideas being exchanged and tested in that special space for conversation – the theatre. We each do it our way, like a version of our own culture. We have ways of preparing food, we have ways of making buildings and we have ways of telling stories. Each has a role, each is valid and each teaches us something.

CHRIS: We are part of a wide conversation. On UK TV now you will see faces which were never shown before, hear stories that went untold before. Our founder Tommy was on the screen in one of the biggest shows of the year.

ANNA: And that is important.

KATIE: But it is not the whole story.

ANNA: Each person in each session we run is important.

CHRIS: Dance, singing, acting...every person in every session deserves to have the best experience possible, even if they might not end up on television.

RICHARD: So, to finish where we started: You should not trust actors. They tell you lies.

ANNA: You cannot trust writers.

KATIE: They tell you stories.

CHRIS: We called this presentation 'A revolution with a smile on its face'

RICHARD: That was a lie.

ANNA: We are not revolutionaries.

KATIE: We are something different.

ANNA: We are 'evolutionaries'. The next turn of the wheel towards a better future.

CHRIS: Bringing to light something that was hidden.

ANNA: In the words of our company member Ros:

'Everything we do gets the message across'...and 'we need to keep collaborating'.

KATIE: We need to keep collaborating.

CHRIS: We want to learn from you, as you learn from us...

RICHARD: ...even though we lied to you about being revolutionaries...

ANNA: ...but we were right about the smile on our face.

CHRIS: That, at least, was true.

Blue Apple Theatre is a teenager – at the time of writing it is approaching eighteen years old. Like many teenagers, perhaps it thinks it knows more than it really does but will later learn just how little it really understood. As all eighteen-year-olds should be, Blue Apple is passionate and open to new ideas, it looks out at the wider world, and sees injustices which need fixing.

Richard Conlon

Teenage reflections

Over recent years, Blue Apple has found a tribe, a group of companies much like us who all want to make the cultural sector a more diverse and representative space – but each is approaching that challenge in a slightly different way. Collectively we are all saying, in our different languages, ‘What about us!?’.

The world is a complex place and our understanding of it is never truly solid because it keeps changing. In the year that I was born (1965) the UK’s most famous Shakespearean actor, Lawrence Olivier, covered his white face with black make-up, deepened his voice and rolled his eyes to play ‘Othello’ in a film version of a stage production which was, even then, problematic to say the least. Were there no black British actors to take that role? Of course there were, but they were never considered at that time. They were in the margins – Lawrence Olivier was the centre of the mainstream.

Was there a cultural crime there? Was Olivier guilty of some massive lapse in taste? It seems now an impossible thing to consider, but over time, the ground beneath us shifts, nothing is solid – last year I saw a black actor playing what would have definitely been a white character in a National Theatre production of Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*. I saw Anthony Sher play a few heterosexual parts despite him being an out gay man. Anthony Sher was certainly pretending to be something he wasn’t – imagine that – an actor pretending to be something they aren’t.

Theatre is a very strange (but wonderful) invention. In so many ways it shouldn’t work – audiences are going to see someone they don’t know pretend to be someone else they don’t know. It sounds odd, but this place of pretence is where we go to reveal truths about ourselves from the perspective of the stage and those characters. It’s a special and just occasionally a

sacred space, but it's one our actors have been excluded from until recently.

Our founder, Tommy Jessop, a man with Down's syndrome, played Hamlet on tour. If we unpick that a little, we can look at it this way... in that production:

He was pretending to be a Danish Prince from the 1500s...

He was pretending to be angry about his uncle marrying his mother...

He was pretending to lose his grip on his sanity...

He was pretending to respond to the suicide of his love...

He was also, arguably, pretending to be a person who did not have Down's syndrome...

Is that a blow for equality, to pretend to be something you're not? Shouldn't Tommy have spent his acting career being his authentic 'Downs-self'? But pretending to be something they are not is exactly what actors do, every week, every day. Another of our actors, Sam Dace, regularly steps on stage and takes on any number of characters who are clearly not (as he is) on the autism spectrum. Sam is pretending to be something he's not. Is this a lapse in taste or a raised fist for emancipation? When blind actor Ryan Kelly plays a sighted character in the UK's long running radio drama 'The Archers' – I suspect he's pleased that he isn't boxed into only playing blind roles...

This is a tricky field and one where logic gets slippery. We want under-represented actors to get the right to play parts made for them – white actors playing black parts simply feels absurd. But that logic suggest that Lady Macbeth should only be played by a Scottish woman, and Bertolt Brecht's *Good Woman of Szechwan* should be brought to life only by women – from Szechwan. Slippery logic. Maybe 'everything belongs to everyone' and each new approach reveals something new – as black women, Ruth Negga and Cush Jumbo must have brought something new to the character of Hamlet. And that's before we discuss who can play the blue aliens from *Avatar*...

If Blue Apple is a teenager, trying to fit into the world and trying to make the world fit us, then the national sector as a whole is in much the same situation. In the UK, even our oldest learning disability theatre companies are probably only perhaps 25 years old, still relatively young members of the established theatre family.

A thought experiment: Think of two other totally different sectors: flight and personal computing – they are nothing like us in their outputs or their outcomes, but they are the same in terms of how they 'emerged'.

The Wright brothers were aeronautic visionaries, and it only took sixty-six years to go from that first flight to Neil Armstrong standing on the moon. The Wright brothers, geniuses though they were, couldn't design an Apollo 11 Lunar Module, but they could lay the foundations that everything which came after them was built upon.

Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak would have saved themselves a lot of time if they had simply made an iPhone back in 1976. But like the Wright brothers, they didn't have the tools (neither physical tools nor tools of the imagination) to do that task. All sectors learn by making mistakes, then making better mistakes the next time. Little by little the culture shifts and the world changes. And the next thing you know, you have just dropped a device with more processing power than the 1969 space programme down the toilet.

Like all self-respecting teenagers, Blue Apple is loudly proud of being the rather wonderful creature that it is. That doesn't mean it isn't also quietly uneasy about not being as 'good at' something as that other company is. We know we are not inclusive enough, we know that we are not the most accessible theatre company around, but we're learning. Each relationship – either across the UK or beyond – teaches us something. We sometimes feel like a leader and a guiding light and sometimes feel like an imposter, struggling to catch up with others who know more than we do.

Our relationship with our European cousins, Divadlo Aldente and Teatr 21 has set our work in a new light. We have seen how the different histories and traditions have manifested in a different tone to the work. We are different, but gloriously so; each imperfect, but each remarkable. Blue Apple feels less overtly political than our partners in the "Be IN!" project, but I remind our actors that each time they walk on stage they are, simply by taking up that space in front of an audience, making a political statement – something like 'I have the right to be heard and be part of this storytelling community'.

We can tie ourselves up in knots worrying about who has the right to play which role, but perhaps there is a benchmark. When the stage at the local theatre, or the screen at the cinema, represents the streets outside it, then we may have achieved something. Acting used to be the preserve of a select, white, educated elite... now it belongs to a wider group; different people telling more interesting stories (or telling old tales through a new lens). The storytelling community is more diverse now and the culture is richer for it, but the story isn't over.

When Blue Apple is no longer a teenager, but a more mature creature, others will come in our wake asking for their chance in the spotlight. Then

we may realise that we have travelled, slowly but surely, from the margins to the mainstream. The culture has already turned to a point where an actor with Down's on our stages, our TV or cinema screens is unusual but not (as it was before) unimaginable. When those others emerge from the shadows, demanding to be part of the debate perhaps it will be our turn to help them, to reach out a hand to the next community to be asking 'What about us!?'.

Questions:

1. What is theatre for you? Do our actions allow theatre creators and recipients to see it that way?

2. What does the theatre we create give to the community for which it is created?

3. What change do we bring?
What reality do we create that way?



Katie Appleford performing in Blue Apple Theatre's production of *The Wizard of Oz*.
Photo by Mike Hall.



Chris Pearce performing in *It's a Wonderful Life*, partnered by Ros Davies. Photo by James Yeats-Brown



Anna Brisbane performing in Blue Apple Theatre's production of *The Tempest*, partnered by Tommy Jessop. Photo by Mike Hall.

Vendula Kacetlová

The diversity of a human being – the uniqueness of its expression

I am a Ph.D. student at the Theatre Faculty of the Janáček Academy of Arts in Brno. In my doctoral research project, I focus on European theatre companies that work with actors with intellectual disabilities. This interest developed through a collaboration with Aldente Theatre from Brno. It is an ensemble featuring twelve people, most of whom have Down's syndrome. The group works on performances together with other professional actors without disabilities. In terms of artistic value, the performances are fully on a par with the productions of established independent theatres in Brno.

I have decided to explore this topic in more depth as part of my PhD thesis. My research project focuses on diversity in the management and communication strategies of European theatre companies with actors with intellectual disabilities. I am particularly interested in theatres that bring theatre professionals with different types of disabilities (and abilities) together on stage and work together to create theatrical works of highest possible quality.

Only such theatre companies are the subject of my research. Therefore, I will not include in my study those groups that are primarily concerned with providing valuable ways of spending time for people with intellectual disabilities, leaving out the artistic aspect.

However, the subject of my research keeps slipping through my fingers. Most of the theatres that I am interested in refuse to think of themselves exclusively. They see themselves as a valid part of the theatre landscape of their city, of their state, of their society. They participate in shaping it.

And I don't want to think of them any differently.

I am going to present the statements of two artists: Gerd Hartmann from the German Theatre THIKWA and Noémie Ksicova, who works with La Compagnie de L'Oiseau-Mouche, a French theatre company based in Roubaix. They represent two theatres of actors with intellectual disabilities. I interviewed them as part of my research project. They both speak out clearly against looking at their companies exclusively through the lens of the disabilities of their members.

For Gerd Hartmann, the fact that he works with actors with intellectual disabilities is the starting point of the collaboration, not its limit. He says:

“We have a big diversity of people. And all of our people are different and this difference is the most important point. So, they are different and they are different as human beings and also different as artists. And we are working together with all our differences. That’s the main point. We don’t help handicapped people. We work together with human beings that are different from us. And of course, some of them need assistance – (...) of course, theatre like ours makes different people visible. That’s clear (...) – And of course our work has a lot of social aspects but we don’t see us as doing social work.”

Gerd Hartmann also told me:

“The main point is that we are offering artistic aspects that other theatres, other groups don’t offer because our performers have a special kind of view of the world, of the human being, of everything and that’s also part of performances naturally.”¹

Noémie Ksicova emphasises that Théâtre de l'Oiseau-Mouche respects its actors and appreciates their work and commitment. The theatre does not mention in their performance teasers that these performances are created by people with intellectual disabilities.

“It is not said anywhere that our actors have disabilities. Never. It’s never written, we don’t talk about it at all. (...)”

1 Kacetlová Vendula. 2022a. *Interview with Gerd Hartmann*. The author’s archive. Brno, 8. 11. 2022.

And she also explained :

“These actors know that they just have a disability (...). And they don’t hide it. If they will, it would be like me saying: Hey, I am Noémie and I have blonde hair, yeah? [She’s got black hair.] They are actors. And this is the perspective: They are actors and also they have disabilities (...)”²

She points out that if there was a disability message before the show, it would create a zoo-like situation: “Hey, people, disabled people are going to do theatre, okay?”. And that’s not the point.

The opportunity for artists without disabilities and actors with intellectual disabilities to create together opens up space for mutual exploration of new themes, unusual issues, ways of approaching material and unexpected interpretations. Both parties are equally respected, and their work and commitment are equally valued. The theatres I examine do not want to put people with intellectual disabilities on show, but to create collaboratively and present the results of their work together, and above all to give the audience a chance to become curious and reflect on the performance.

And in my research, I don’t want to think about these theatres and their work any differently.

2 Kacetlová Vendula. 2022b. *Interview with Noémie Ksicova*. The author’s archive. Brno, 17. 11. 2022.

Questions:

1. What is the research task: to present one's own perspective on the research area or to present the perspective of representatives of the research area? Or perhaps to combine these two approaches?

2. How to build communication related to the creative work of people with disabilities - when to omit this aspect of their identity and when to accentuate it?

3. How does mentioning or not mentioning disability in communication affect the message in a specific situational context?

Jitka Vrbková

Actor-specific theatre or inclusion – a word that is no longer needed

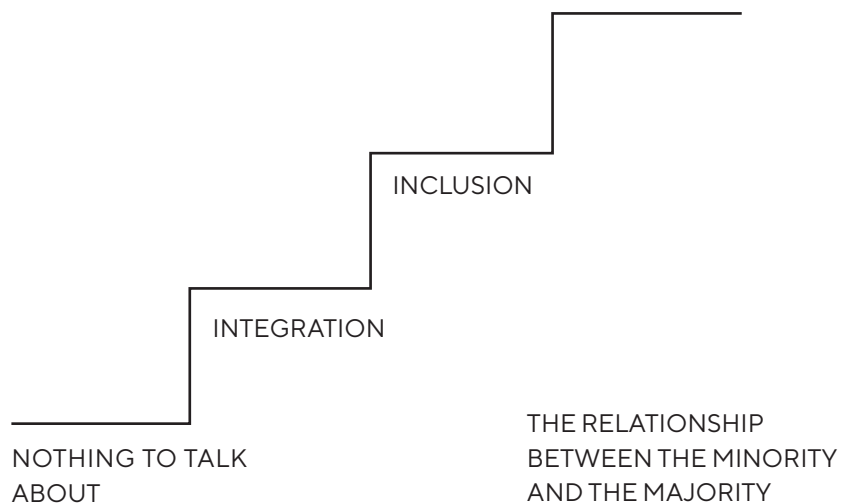
Inclusion... for some a threat, for others an unattainable dream. However, I believe we all have one thing in common: we have stopped thinking about this word. We are sure that its meaning is perfectly familiar to us and there is no need to analyse or explore it further. Let's make an exception and return to the phenomenon called "inclusion".

Let's walk up the stairs together...

I will describe how I perceive the discussion about the mutual relationship between minorities and majorities, using the metaphor of climbing the stairs. We start from the level zero – it could be described as "nothing to talk about": the issue of minorities and their exclusion is of no interest to anyone. We are not aware of the existence of minorities, and even if we were, we do not intend to deal with the issue.

The first step we can climb (with enormous effort) is "integration". This stage of reflection is based on the idea of integrating those in the minority into the life of the majority so that the majority does not feel harmed. Efforts here focus on eliminating the problems that integration can involve: it is important that people from the minority benefit from being part of the majority while maintaining the comfort of the majority.

Today, the term “integration” is being abandoned, often replaced by the term “inclusion”; hence, few people recognise the difference between the two. However, “inclusion” marks another level of reflection on the reality of minorities and majorities. It signifies the mutual relations of minorities and majorities in which both groups not only do not suffer but also benefit. In the natural sciences, this is called mutualism, which means a mutually beneficial relationship between two organisms (symbiosis), with both organisms benefiting from the mutual relationship.



We can illustrate these three steps with the example of education:

- “Nothing to talk about” involves the strict separation of ordinary schools from special schools.
- “Integration” means the inclusion of people with disabilities in the classroom for pupils without disabilities. The teaching of children with disabilities is organised so that they do not interfere with or hold back others.
- “Inclusion” is a state in which teachers realise that the presence of a student with a disability is beneficial for the whole class and has a positive impact on the group. Children begin to confront the fact that not everyone

is the same and simultaneously learn to help. They realise that there are aspects of life where their classmate with a disability has an advantage over them (e.g. the person easily establishes relationships with other people or has a sense of humour). In this way, children can rebuild their hierarchy of values and see that success in life does not have to be linked only to good grades.

Inclusion – still utopian in the Czech Republic (at least in education) – seems to be the ideal state. But is it really the last “step” on our path? Can we not go further?

Let’s leave our steps for a moment and follow a different path, in the footsteps of Aldente Theatre, where I work every day. Maybe we will find the answer there.

Aldente Theatre’s path

Aldente Theatre was established in 2008¹. Since 2014, besides actors without disabilities from professional theatres, it has employed underage actors with Down’s syndrome (hereafter referred to as DS). This happened almost overnight: when I, the directress and founder of this theatre, became the mother of a girl with DS. In 2014, we decided to stage a short story by Denisa Střihavková², a Czech author with DS, and invited students from the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts and children with DS aged 8 to 15 to participate. The play was entitled *Mummy You’re as important as the Barriers in the Tunnel!*³ and the adventure of creating it made us stay on this theatrical path and become a theatre of actors with Down’s syndrome.

At the beginning of this path we asked ourselves numerous questions: should we change the dramatic line of our theatre? Should we change the name completely? Looking for answers, we decided to define for ourselves what kind of theatre we were doing. What is its specificity? Why do we not like the term “integrational theatre” (popular in the Czech Republic) or the English term, “disability art”?⁴

¹ www.divadloaldente.cz

² Denisa Střihavková: *This Matters (Na tom záleží)*. Prague: JPM tisk, 2003. ISBN 80-86313-01-8.

³ Theatre Aldente (Divadlo Aldente) – Denisa Střihavková (et al.): *Mummy You’re as important as the Barriers in the Tunnel! (Maminko, jsi důležitá jako šraňky v tunelu!)*. Premiere: 11 May 2014, Divadlo Barka, Brno. Director: Jitka Vrbková.

⁴ For more, read: Vrbková et al, *Inclusion through Theatre – A Journey of an Actor with Down’s syndrome to Cognisant Artistic Creation and Social Acceptance (Inkluze divadlem: Cesta herce s Downovým syndromem k cílené umělecké tvorbě a k přijetí do společnosti)*, Brno: Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno, Faculty of Theatre, 2022, p. 51. ISBN 978-80-7460-204-7.

Actor-specific theatre

Theatre professionals and audiences thought we had created a whole new kind of theatre – we ourselves didn't feel that way. Before 2014, we often did less popular theatre forms, such as poetic theatre, synthetic theatre⁵, or site-specific theatre projects. After the inclusion of people with DS in the company, nothing has actually changed in this respect. We simply moved from site-specific to actor-specific⁶. If site-specific projects are inspired by a specific place with a unique genius loci, then the actor and their unique qualities are the inspiration for actor-specific theatre. If site-specific projects have to deal with certain challenges that a specific, non-theatrical space brings (e.g. echo, little space for the audience, rain, etc.), the same can also be said for actor-specific theatre – e.g. an actor with DS will probably never have a precise and clear pronunciation and may therefore be less well understood. The genius loci of a specific location are strong enough to make it worth overcoming any difficulties or treating them as part of the game. It is no different in actor-specific theatre. Dramaturgical work is also similar – we can use a text with any content, but we have to be aware that the space (in the case of site-specific performance) or the actor (in the case of actor-specific performance) can significantly affect the meaning. What both types of theatre have in common are the desire for adventure and the fulfilment derived from exploration.

In our view of theatre, the term actor-specific has helped us in two ways: firstly, it accurately describes the way we work (in dramaturgy and directing, we rely on the specific characteristics of actors with DS; which then become the basis of the theatrical poetics). Secondly, it has enabled us to eliminate terms such as "integration", "inclusion", "actors with disabilities"... To put it another way: we have moved away from emphasising the otherness of our actors in the sense that they are impaired or disadvantaged (actors with disabilities who can't cope with everything) and, on the contrary, we have focused on accentuating their uniqueness in a positive sense⁷.

5 A synthesis of movement, word and music in which each element is an equally important medium of meaning – the word is therefore not superior to the other elements of the language of theatre.

6 Read more in the author's PhD thesis – Vrbková *Theatre Actor-specific. Down's syndrome as a Theatre Stylization (Divadlo actor-specific: Downův syndrom jako divadelní stylizace)*. Brno: Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno, Faculty of Theatre, 2020, p. 49.

7 For similar reasons, the term "specific theatre" began to be used at the Theatre Faculty of the Prague AMÚ. Vladimír Novák and Kateřina Šplíchalová consider the term *actor-specific* to be more precise and specific. Compare: Novák Vladimír, Šplíchalová Mocová Kateřina, ed. 2014. *Specifické divadlo. (Specific Theatre)* Pardubice: Studio Press a Katedra alternativního a loutkového divadla AMU v Praze, 2014. ISBN 978-80-7331-330-2.



Staging an ancient tragedy by an unknown author: *Octavia – There Are No Gods!* (*Octavia – bohové nejsou!*). A bloody tragedy performed after dark on ladders in a children's playground. The contradiction between the text (bloody tragedy) and the site of the performance (playground) is a factor that generates meaning. The site-specific space is a source of theatrical poetics and is a vehicle for meaning. The same is true in actor-specific theatre.

Aldente Theatre (Divadlo Aldente): *Octavia – There Are No Gods!*
Premiere: 5 October 2009, Kraví hora, Brno. Director: Jitka Vrbková.
Photo: Pavel Šarbort, 2009.

The allegory of a bus: Drivers and Passenger

And now let's return to reflections on inclusion and integration and reflect on which step of the stairs Aldente Theatre has reached. Let me say that the first thing that we did in 2014 was a leap up two steps at once – from the position of "the relationship between minorities and majorities is nothing to talk about" we jumped straight to the step of "inclusion", skipping over the step of "integration". This is because we have never assumed that actors with DS are merely "tolerated" on stage; on the contrary, they are the essence of every performance. At the same time, it is true that rehearsing with actors with DS, was very difficult. The children with DS behaved very spontaneously

in rehearsals, and for a long time they did not perceive theatre as a “pre-arranged form”, but as a “proposal” that they could (but did not have to) use.

Therefore, they did what they wanted on stage – with the director’s job being to make this “proposal” “inviting” enough for them to join in at the exact moment and place as planned. The task of the actors without disabilities, on the other hand, was to maintain the framework of the performance: to guide it and incorporate all the things happening on stage.... This refers to all the things that actors with DS do on stage although they shouldn’t, or conversely, don’t do although they should. Each show thus became a great adventure and in some sense a unique performance.

Our productions could be compared to a bus for rent. Each bus has a driver who drives it; the destination, however, is the choice of the passengers. The travellers are also the ones who create the atmosphere of the trip – they can sit quietly on the bus, they can talk, they can also sing, shout, worry, or even be drunk... The question “What was the trip like?” is usually answered based on the behaviour of the passengers, not the driver. The latter generally holds the wheel, watches the road, and makes sure that the bus reaches the destination of the passengers’ dreams. But both parties need each other – the driver needs the passengers, while the passengers need the driver. Inclusion.

We and You

The situation was slowly changing. Our “passengers” gradually began to acquire a “driving licence”, so the steering wheel could be handed over to them for a while, and they could take turns behind the wheel. Those who were the drivers at the beginning could then take the seats of the passengers and, together with others, co-create the atmosphere of the journey. Each of the actors with and without disabilities brought a different quality to the performance.

The first staging, when the place “at the steering wheel” was taken in turns by actors with and without disabilities, was Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Some of the actors with Down’s syndrome had such a clear diction that they were able to be partners in the dialogue, despite Sophocles’ difficult, long, and archaic verses. The diction of some other actors was not so good, and so together with the actors without disabilities, they produced collective creations: *Antigone* was played by three actresses, and the role of Creon was performed by two actors – each of them “spoke a different language” (one with words, the other – more with his body).



The original staging of *Who Am I?* based on real events from the lives of actors with DS. A psychological research scene – during rehearsals we agreed on who should say what so that the actress playing the role of the psychologist could end the research with a punchline, a joke. However, during the performances, the actors came with new lines because they liked the fact that their fellow actors without DS had to think up and react appropriately ad hoc.

Aldente Theatre, *Who Am I?* (Divadlo Aldente: *Who am I?*). Premiere: 17 September 2017, Artbar Druhý Pád, Brno. Director: Jitka Vrbková.

Photo: Jiří Kottas, 2018.



The original staging of *The Wall (Zed)* – genesis, through the eyes of actors with DS. A ritual scene of the birth of the human: actress Martina Trusková runs around the stage and comes up with her lines, which each time are different and take longer. The other actors have to take this into account.

Divadlo Aldente: *The Wall (Zed)*. Premiere: 23rd of September 2018, Artbar Druhý Pád, Brno. Director: Jitka Vrbková.

Photo: Jiří Kottas, 2019.

Swapping places at the steering wheel in the dramatic work had a similar effect. If I as a directress were to find the theme of Sophocles' *Antigone* on my own, I would point to the political struggle, the moral dilemma between rebellion against authority and against the gods, the inequality between men and women, the rebellion of the young generation... When we started rehearsals, the actors with DS began to discover dimensions that I had never noticed before in *Antigone*: "*Antigone* is about the love of a sister for a sister". "It's about the love between Haemon and Antigone." On stage, they made their claims clear with their acting: Hana Bartoňová's Ismene was not just a weak woman, a background for Antigone's greatness – her Ismene was first and foremost an infinitely loving woman who was fully capable of standing up for herself.

The theme of the performance was not imposed by those without disabilities, nor exclusively by those with DS. It united the interests of all of us – those with and without disabilities, those in their twenties and those in their fifties, men, and women. All of us... But who exactly are "we" at the Aldente Theatre? Does "we" refer to women? Or to people without disabilities? The words "we" and "you" disappear, blurred. It is not clear who is who. It is no longer important. Each member of our company is an individual with unique skills and we see them as such.



Aldente Theatre, *Antigone* by Sophocles. Premiere: 28 June 2021, Barka Theatre, Brno. Directed by Jitka Vrbková. Photo by Nikola Minářová.



Antigone (Eliška Vrbková) and Ismene (Hana Bartoňová).
Photo by Jiří Kottas.

Ismene by Hana Bartoňová is, above all, a fragile and loving woman, by no means a weak woman.
Photo by Jiří Kottas.



Haemon (Martin Kříž) fights for his beloved Antigone, whom he wishes to marry.
Photo by Jiří Kottas.

Inclusion: a word that is no longer needed

And here we come to the last step of our staircase, where the next floor begins – the word inclusion loses its meaning here: for it is not clear who is being included and where. Otherness has ceased to be a topic, for it has become unimportant for us to observe and compare what the norm is. We could name this new floor – “The relationship between minority and majority is nothing to talk about”....

We have reached this point because we make art – in which the notion of the norm is diluted, dissolved, and uniqueness, difference, and originality are valued instead. We make art and, therefore, it is easier for us to avoid the mistakes we often see in the pursuit of inclusivity, which are counter-productive. Let me give you very concrete examples:

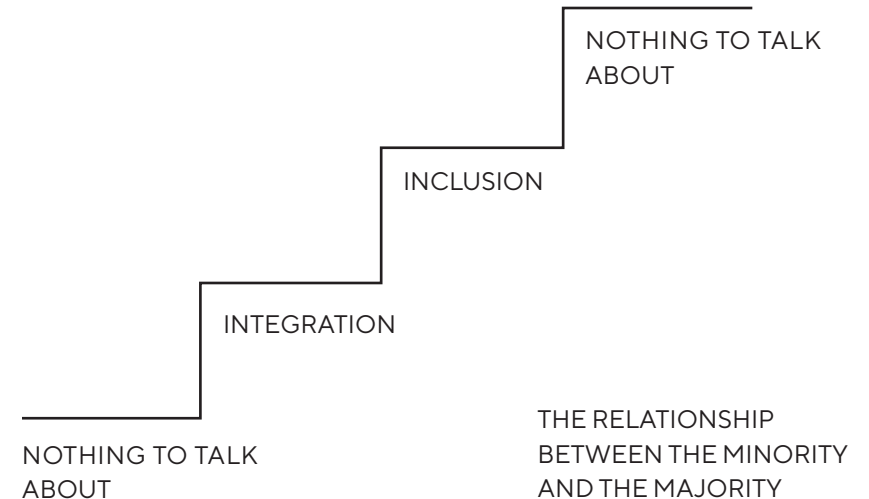
– A person with a learning disability is invited to a conference to give a lecture, but because they are not be able to prepare their speech, they read out the views of someone else.

– A person with a learning disability is invited to a panel discussion, but for the other participants they are not seen as partners in an intellectual discussion. However, no one gives them this impression.

Both models lead to a further widening of the gap between us because, in reality, a person with a disability placed in a situation like this makes no contribution. Undoubtedly, this is not because this person has nothing to offer but because we are the ones who prevent them from using their own language – that is, from finding a form in which they could express their opinions and their view of the world. At the same time, I want to emphasise that the form does not have to be limited to the written or spoken word.

It is not always easy to find such a form. Theatre has enabled us to do this; thanks to it, we have discovered the actor-specific formula, which is based on actors and their means of expression. It uncovers treasures. It sets no a priori expectations or concrete ideas. It does not know what the norm is. It does not understand who the “other” is. Otherness does not exist. The attitude to otherness is no longer an issue.

Have we completed the circle and returned to the beginning? We are not walking in a circle but in a spiral. The staircase is a spiral and we are on a step called the same as in the beginning, only one floor higher. This is the beginning of something new.



Questions:

1. What are the minority-majority relations in our organisation (theatre, team, institution)?

2. Is otherness a topic in our organisation? What does addressing it bring into discussion? What does its absence mean?

3. What is actor-specific theatre? How could this concept be applied to my field of work (for example, what could an employee-specific institution or an audience-specific event be like)?

Marie Měkotová
Lenka Galatíková
Barbora Suchopárková
Klára Kulhavá
Hana Kábrtová
Anna Marie Slobodová
Miroslava Schejbalová
Kristýna Kučerová

Together on stage

The collaboration of actors with otherness and without it on stage can have very different forms. Why do creators decide to use it and how does it work with the audience? Is it some kind of a supportive tool for actors with disabilities, a certain form of personal assistance? Is it an aesthetical decision that helps produce specific meanings within theatre performances? Do non-disabled actors create a fixed framework of the performance in which actors with otherness freely exist? Or is this cooperation an opportunity for everyone to develop both professionally and personally?

These questions have been troubling us throughout the whole “Be IN-!(clusive)” research. The project connects young people (researchers) who are interested in inclusion in theatre. It also focuses on the cooperation of three European theatres of actors with learning disabilities - Divadlo Aldente (CZ), Blue Apple Theatre (UK) and Teatr 21 (PL).

As an introduction to the remaining part of the article, watch the following video.



This video is a part of *Antigone*² by Divadlo Aldente. It shows a dialogue between a father and a son. The slap was fully improvised. So what this unexpected situation did was bring to light really a lot of questions, because of the consequences it would bring...Was it acting? Was it personal? And if so, for whom? Can one see it as harassment or was it a glimpse of respect and partnership?

Since the title of our article is “Together on Stage”, we want to give you an insight about the interplay of actors with a learning disability and actors without a learning disability. For more clarity, let’s divide it into three different groups, into three perspectives: “Support”, “The aesthetic aspect” and “Looking for a common path”.

Support

Let’s watch another video.³



4

This video is closely related to the first perspective which we call “Support”. Vašek, the actor without a disability, speaks about his first reactions, his first feelings when he decided to collaborate with Divadlo Aldente. He thought it was charity. Simple as that. To add more context to this approach, we should compare what Vašek said with the following quotations from our spectators.

“I think that such an element can be very supportive for an actor with a disability. The actor knows that he/she is not alone on the stage, which could be uncomfortable for him/her.”

2 Sophocles: *Antigone*. Directed by Jitka Vrbková. Divadlo Aldente, 2021.

3 *We are not down! [Nejsme down!]*. A documentary film by Lea Surovcová, Czech television, 2020. Available at: <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/12966285303-nejsme-down/>.

4 Video 2 - Vašek 1 - <https://youtu.be/ssm8CBYKEuw>.

“For me, it was a functional way that helps an actor with a disability create and present his/her role in a way he/she can.”

“I didn’t feel like she needed someone else standing there with her during the performance. It could definitely have just worked for me without it.”

These three quotations show how differently people perceive the collaboration between actors with a learning disability and actors without it. It can be seen as a support, which doesn’t change the fact that it doesn’t necessarily have to be the creator’s main intention.

The aesthetic aspect

Now we would like to show you another video.



5

This video makes another point and presents another perspective, namely “The aesthetic aspect”. We can perceive the partnership between actors with a learning disability and actors without a learning disability as something that influences the aesthetics, which is directly connected with the visual element. Therefore, the best way to describe it is to show it. Let’s see some photos from Theatre Aldente’s production of *Antigone*⁶ where some of the characters were played by multiple actors at once.

5 Video 3 - Vašek 2 - <https://youtu.be/MCxzUb5ya7Y>.

6 Sofokles: *Antigone*. Directed by Jitka Vrbková. Divadlo Aldente, 2021.



Photo by Veronika Bartoňová.



Photo by Jiří Kottas.



Photo by Anna Marie Slobodová.

Let's hear from the audience once again – this is how these scenes were described:

“This was a bilingual scene. The same emotions but in two different languages. The interplay between the kings was most interesting for me because of the expression. The fact that they both expressed the same thing, but in a different way. One – using words and the other – using his voice but without words. That was really powerful for me.”

To summarise, another way to perceive the interplay between actors with a learning disability and actors without it consists in paying attention to the aesthetic aspect.

Looking for a common path

The last part of our article addresses the third perspective: “Looking for a Common Path”. In this section, we examine how actors without a learning disability react to unexpected behaviours from actors with a learning disability. This aspect can be seen in an excerpt from the documentary *Revolution 21* by Teatr21⁷.

⁷ *Rewolucja 21*, a documentary film by Martyna Peszko, 2022.



8

This video is about “communication”. The director communicates her needs, as well as the actress communicates her needs. They are partners to each other. What we can see here is respect for each other, understanding, and looking for a common way to communicate one’s needs.

Let’s look at other examples showing cooperation based on partnership:



9

This is a part of *The Wall* (a performance by Divadlo Aldente).¹⁰ Martina, an actress with Down’s syndrome, refused to leave the stage when she was supposed to do it. Her non-disabled acting colleague, Jan, therefore decided to improvise. Pavel Čadek, a musician whose music Martina likes to listen to, was in the audience. She became very attached to him during the performance. Jan started acting in a way that allowed him to invite Pavel to the

8 Video 4 – *Revoluce 21* – <https://youtu.be/ARnIAWSFF00>.

9 Video 5 – *Čadek a Marta* – <https://youtu.be/rCIUGOsDPZk>.

10 *The Wall*. Directed by Jitka Vrbková. Divadlo Aldente, 2018.

performance and ask him to take Martina off the stage. Jan did so through a game which allowed him to enter Martina’s reality. This is why she accepted his offer to leave together with her idol.

Another example comes from rehearsals of *Antigone* by Divadlo Aldente. Jitka Vrbková, the director, had to change her interpretation of the play which she perceived mainly as political. The actors, nevertheless, wanted the play to be about love, wedding and marriage. As a result of this dialogue, the performance ends with a wedding of Haemon and Antigone. The director changed the dramaturgy because she values her actors and their opinions and she respects them as professionals.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the beginning, we have been trying to give you three different perspectives on how we can perceive the interplay of actors on stage: those with a learning disability and those without it. Let’s watch again the scene we mentioned in the beginning.



11

At this point, it is important to say that Martin, who played Haemon, accepted this unexpected, potentially controversial behaviour of another actor who knocked off his glasses. His character is very good and polite. We don’t suppose his character would do that, but this was an unexpected situation and both actors kind of worked with that. We think this video proves that actors with learning disabilities as well as actors without learning disabilities respect each other as equal partners. They just react to one another and treat each other as equal partners.

11 Video 6 = Video 1 – *Facka*.

These three perspectives that we have presented emerged during our research process. We learned that we can perceive the interplay between actors as support or an aesthetic aspect of the performance. In our opinion, these perspectives are directly connected to finding the right way or a common path. And this happens not only on the stage, but also during rehearsals. This happens between actors, between an actor and a director, and it has an impact on the spectator. So, there is also a relationship between the actor and the spectator. And all these people work TOGETHER ON STAGE.

Questions:

1. What perspectives do I adopt when watching performances that feature people with disabilities?

2. How do I perceive stage collaborations between people with and without disabilities?

Aleksandra Skotarek

The body of an actress and the morality of an audience

My name is Aleksandra Skotarek. I am thirty-six years old. I am an adult woman with an intellectual disability. I have been working as an actress at Theatre 21 for the last 17 years. I have created different roles on stage through my body. I have a private body and I have a stage body - which co-creates the performances. The private body means being real, decent, accepted by others. The stage body is the inner side of nudity - upper and lower. On stage I work with the upper and lower parts of my body. The upper one reaches from my face to the waist, it is public and personal at the same time. The lower part reaches from the waist down - it is domestic and forbidden, indecent. When I touch my breasts on stage, or show my belly and pants, I do not do this privately: I perform, I convey my sexuality, my emotions, my norm, my non-ideal body - the tool of my work. I do this for myself and for the audience - although not everyone accepts this. I shame with a truth that hurts. I expose my body in movements and images: when I put a pillow between my legs, when I cover myself with a long purple scarf, when I am dressed in punk clothes and when I am exuberant and my body is rebellious.... And I am not ashamed of any of these expressions of my body.

It's not about playing my privacy, it is about building a character on stage - the theatre assigns different identities to my body. When I work on a role, I feel important, needed and brave in my acting. I love this kind of theatre. In *PokaZ* I had a scene with a mirror: I revealed my upper nudity to show the audience that they must finally accept the body I have. For me, this is moral - beautiful, bodily and brave. It is my freedom in my body, the right to decide about my upper and lower nudity.

I enjoy my stage presence - it is the most important part of my professional life for me. I feel accepted and appreciated as an actress. No less important is working with the actors and actresses of Theatre 21 and the relationship with the audience. I enjoy the fact that we can speak from the stage about things that matter to us and move us. Like, for instance, in *Libido romantico* - especially in the last scene, which shows parents of people with intellectual disabilities suppressing their children's sexuality. I find this performance unique and powerful, necessary and beautiful. It says that the body is also a pleasure. The body is good and important. It is part of being yourself.

I am not ashamed of my body myself - it is rather others who are ashamed of it, because it reveals what is unspoken, latent, usually hidden, judged as indecent. My intellectual disability is very important to me, important in my life and in being myself. Let's start seeing people with intellectual disabilities as people with complex, interesting identities. We can and want to tell stories from the stage with the kind of body we have.

The text is based on a conversation between Aleksandra Skotarek and Justyna Lipko-Konieczna, who asked questions and faithfully recorded the author's answers, asking further questions when something needed to be clarified.

Questions:

1. What emotions does my disability evoke in people around me? What does it say about these people?

2. What perceptions of me by others do I refuse to accept?

3. What do I want others to know about my experience of myself?



A photograph from Theatre 21's performance *PokaZ (The Show)*, directed by Justyna Wielgus.
Photo by Paweł Kuligowski.



A photograph from the production of Theatre 21's performance *Libido Romantica* at the Open the Door festival.
Photo by Jeremi Astashov.



A photograph from Aleksandra Skotarek's solo performance *Nie jestem rośliną. Strumień świadomości. (I Am Not a Plant. A Stream of Consciousness.)* Photo by Alicja Szulc.

Dominika Feiglewicz

In between – about the possibilities arising from the experience of working with d/Deaf people in theatre and arts education

Let's start with a movement exercise: using your body, show your first association with the word "between". Attention: 3, 2, 1 - now!

Very often people with hearing disabilities are suspended between the hearing and d/Deaf worlds. They cannot fully belong only to the latter, because they also live in the hearing world and are constantly adapting to its rules.

Also people who work in institutions, foundations and associations often choose to operate between these two worlds. They can create bridges between their own institution, artists, the audience, and artists with hearing disabilities.

I myself also feel that in many professional areas I am in between: as an actress I can act and create art with people with disabilities, as an accessibility coordinator I can invite artists to collaborate in the theatre and build accessibility in the institution, as an NGO member I can invite others to join activities run by the organisation. I am in between spaces, institutions and tasks. I recognise this state as an opportunity to broaden my agency and field of action.

¹ In sign language, the word can be signed like this: https://www.spreadthesign.com/pl.pl/search/?cls=2&last_open_id=&last_to_lang=&q=pomi%C4%99dzy

JOURNEY

I started my journey into the deaf world in 2017. It started with working with four d/Deaf people at Cricoteka in Kraków. Together we created the performance *War in Heaven (Wojna w niebie)* which won The Best Off award given to the best independent performance in Poland. This first experience encouraged me to continue working in this area. I ran theatre, movement and creative workshops, after some time I founded the Migawka Foundation and started working at the Słowacki Theatre, where I created more events accessible to d/Deaf people. And then it was time for the next productions – *Sisterhood (Siostrzeństwo)* (in which I co-starred with deaf actress Patrycja Jarosińska) and *Romeo and Juliet (Romeo i Julia)* (starring hearing and deaf people, and prepared together with another director Zdenka Pszczołowska).

These five years of being in between have allowed me to gain experience in different areas and this is what I want to share further in this text.

EXPERIENCE

Over the years I have worked with d/Deaf people and observed their abilities, looked at their needs in the area of art, delved into their culture. In my work with them, I drew on the knowledge and skills I had gained from my artistic education (I had graduated from the Academy of Theatre Arts in Kraków) and my work at a large cultural institution such as the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre. In doing so, I developed my working methods and creative techniques for communicating artistic knowledge and working with d/Deaf and hearing people. My work is based on the techniques of Konstantin Stanislavski, Anton Chekhov and Bogusław Schaeffer, which I combine with the potential of Polish Sign Language and Polish phonic language. Thanks to this mixture created from what is in between, a volcano of creative possibilities erupts.

In the course of various activities, I have come to realise how valuable it is to create working teams of people who are hearing, d/Deaf or hard of hearing and a Polish Sign Language interpreter. Such teams allow to build bridges between the two worlds. They allow the exchange of experiences, support and facilitate the development of good cooperation practices – so that both parties can grow, become stronger and more independent as creators. At the Migawka Foundation, we create and conduct workshops or meetings in such teams.

Teams also collaborate perfectly well when working on a performance – we used this working formula in the production of *Romeo and Juliet*. We

have an acting team with two deaf actors (Dominika Kozłowska and Rafał Bołdys) and two hearing actors (Marta Mazurek and Karol Kubasiewicz). The costume design team is made up of d/Deaf Krystian Foltyniewicz and hearing Anna Oramus. Krystian has amazing skills and imagination, but he has never yet worked on a theatre production. These are his first steps, so Ania accompanies him and shares her experience of working as a costume and set designer. I form a team with the deaf playwright Jakub Studziński. We are both in collaboration with deaf actors. The dramaturge is responsible for the correctness of the text in Polish Sign Language and for translating and creating the interpretation in sign language so that it fulfils two conditions: it is comprehensible and on a high artistic level. An interpreter is also present at rehearsals to support the work of each team and our joint communication.

The work began with a training session in Poland for the whole team of creators by specialists from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, which runs an acting course for the d/Deaf. We then tackled text, translation, introducing hearing actors to sign language, working with the choreographer on the body and creating relationships and building trust within the team. The result of the work is a bilingual performance (in Polish and Polish Sign Language) – our aim was to make it fully accessible to all people with and without hearing disabilities.

NETWORKING

Finally, I want to share a practice that may seem completely unobvious: giving others a sign that I exist and want to do something. I encourage anyone who feels they would like to try their hand at art to do this – speak up! I myself often work with people who have been recommended by someone or have just reached out to me and said: HELLO, I AM HERE, I CAN DO THINGS, MAYBE YOU HAVE A JOB FOR ME OR KNOW WHERE TO LOOK FOR ONE?. Let's network, let's recommend each other, let others know we are here and want to do something! Let's make space together for more in between – let's build and create opportunities (for others and ourselves)!

Questions:

1. What does 'in between' mean in my case?

2. Which elements of my education and experience can I use to build bridges?

3. What new possibilities and goals do I see today in the field of inclusion, thanks to the path I have walked? What new perspectives does this reveal to me?

4. Whom can I tell what I do and what I can do? / How and in what ways can I involve those from whom I get signs that they want to be involved?



A photograph from the theatre workshop. Photo by Klaudyna Schubert.



A photograph from the theatre workshop. Photo by Klaudyna Schubert.



A photograph from the theatre workshop. Photo by Klaudyna Schubert.



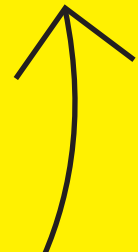
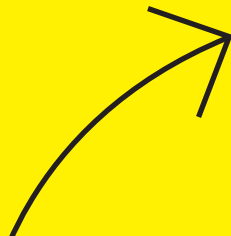
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1 Invitation to the performance of "Romeo and Juliet". Video available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfaGKF7kK1k>

PART III



**The responsibility
of the institutions**



Beata Szczucińska

Doors in the castle (under siege)

The Theatre Academy Anno Domini 2023 is an institution through which several storms have passed in the last four years. The obvious and common to us all: the pandemic and remote studying have resulted in the disruption of the learning process, the exposure of depressive states of community members and the deregulation of an already unstable labour market. The war in Ukraine exacerbated the sense of insecurity, and the economic crisis forced the academy to close its buildings again and return to remote studying.

Internally, the academy had to face the aftermath of Anna Paliga's speech¹ – and although it was not the Theatre Academy that was at the centre of this discussion, we were aware that the problem of violence in the current model of education also affected us. We started to work on many levels and made sure that remedial actions were consistently implemented: we introduced training for the staff and students on how to counteract discrimination and other undesirable phenomena; we changed the system of evaluating students' progress and giving grades and feedback; we introduced regulations to counteract abuse; we conducted a study, unprecedented in the world, on the phenomenon of violence in the process of studying and in building relationships at the Theatre Academy². There has been a noticeable change within the academy – the upheaval is so present that tensions between those in favour of the transformation and those unconvinced by its direction have clearly emerged. Expectations from both sides are rising – consequently creating small and large sieges, sometimes fronts.

1 In March 2021, Anna Paliga published a post on Facebook, describing specific situations she experienced in the process of studying at the Łódź Film School. This post sparked a wave of further testimonies and statements and initiated a wide-ranging discussion about the phenomenon of violence in theatre colleges and film school.

2 The report published by the Institute of Sociology at the University of Warsaw "(Un)consent to Boundary Crossing. A Study of Violence and Discrimination at the A. Zelwerowicz Theatre Academy in Warsaw" is available on the Academy's website: "Raport: (Nie)zgoda na przekraczanie granic – Akademia Teatralna" [<http://akademia.at.edu.pl/raport-niezgoda-na-przekraczanie-granic/>].

The #MeToo turmoil in theatre higher education has not damaged the reputation of universities in the eyes of applicants: on the acting course in Warsaw alone, an average of 1,200 people are still competing for 24 places (50 applicants per place). It is difficult to conquer this fortress and clasp your marksheet on top of it. But the conquerors, having successfully laid siege, have specific expectations of the Academy: they want to receive a professional training that will enable them to conquer the market and make a career. This is what they came here for, this is what they have devoted years of preparation and sacrifice to. Many times they have a very concrete plan for their lives and expect Olympic preparation.

The requirements and expectations of the labour market in the creative sector change very rapidly, making it not easy for the deans. It is the university's responsibility to prepare graduates for employment. This is why we stuff study programmes with classes, compulsory and supplementary subjects, turning Maslow's pyramid upside down for students: they have no time to sleep or eat, and we expect them to be constantly ready to create and navigate among aesthetic categories. That is a programme siege.

The academic castle is already under siege from several sides – and I have not yet touched on the issue of people with disabilities in the Theatre Academy. Although the topic is already present in the consciousness of the academy's community, I have to write it honestly – its foray is fatigue. We have not yet recovered from the pandemic, the outbreak of the war and the crisis of relationships, we are in a rush and uncertainty, and respond ad hoc to the present – and there is already a big and difficult topic at the gates: how to work with people with disabilities at the Theatre Academy, fairly reconciling the ambitions and expectations of all those interested in education at our university?

After one of the stagings of the play directed by Justyna Wielgus, *What Happened to Sarah Bernhardt's Leg?*, a conversation was held about the presence of people with disabilities in theatre and the education system for theatre. I listened to the words of the speakers and at one point I felt their strong emotions. The speakers called for breaking up the system, tearing down these "Bastilles" (by which they meant theatre schools) and establishing their own rules. I thought to myself: "Here we have another siege".

This desire to overthrow the Bastille at Miodowa Street is understandable to me. It is true that so far in the training of theatre artists – especially actors – any disability was unthinkable.

And yet the system is unravelling.

After the pandemic, we had to deal with manifestations of neuroatypicality or adaptive disorders. Today's generation of students is increasingly self-aware; they can recognise their incongruity, they are not ashamed of it, they speak openly about their adaptation difficulties or illnesses, forcing the institution to respond adequately. The most powerful activator of change is the community of people with disabilities – increasingly bold in demanding the enforcement of their rights. Under the law, people with disabilities can expect to be provided with full access to learning and expect the institutions to take action against discrimination.

The Theatre Academy is implementing projects to improve accessibility (including architectural, digital and communication accessibility) in accordance with the guidelines, and I could go on for a long time about the changes that have been made but that is not the point³. These are very important activities, but the most important thing is that a serious conversation has begun about the place of people with disabilities in the Theatre Academy. The conversation is taking place at meetings of the Senate, the Academy Council, the course committees for education – it is difficult, lively, antagonising, but it is definitely a serious conversation. We are not discussing a fig leaf, but an actual challenge.

I note the anxiety and uncertainty of academic staff. I dare to put forward the thesis that this anxiety is primarily due to the confusion between the orders of art and therapy. Theatre (and, more broadly, art) therapy is an important area, but it is not related to what people with disabilities who want to study at the Theatre Academy care about. They don't expect therapy. They don't expect pity. They do not expect a special treatment. They expect fair access to education and fair representation in the arts.

Even if we reassure academic staff that people with disabilities do not expect from the academy therapy but vocational training, this does not remove the fundamental question:

WHAT KIND OF THEATRE ARE WE EDUCATING FOR?

Consciously simplifying the work of philosophers and the knowledge that Tomasz Kubikowski has given me, I spread the vision of what an actor is into two poles:

3 For the record, I would like to add that the academy is implementing the project "DOSTĘPN[AT]. Increasing Accessibility at the Aleksander Zelwerowicz Theatre Academy in Warsaw", which aims to provide basic architectural, communication and digital accessibility. It is also a partner in the project "Show Your Tongue", implemented by the Centre for Inclusive Arts, which addresses the interface of disability, theatre and education and problematises accessibility, aesthetics, acting and the canon, as well as disability in theatre history in various ways.

The left pole – a reenactor, a versatile instrument, a perfect medium of any character; a reflection of data.

The right pole – a performer who explores and expresses their own experience; a direct transmission of data.

The tradition of training at the Theatre Academy oscillates very much towards the left pole⁴. People with disabilities are likely to put pressure on the academy to change course towards the right pole. This shift raises a number of questions in the university discussion. Are we ready for this and does it actually make sense to move away from the current course? What about those who are “competing in the Olympic race”? Will changes to the university mean taking away their chance to have the best acting/directing training in the country?

Or is this polar assumption misguided?

And this is where the doors in my head start to open, which I have been opening slightly ever since I started thinking seriously about this topic.

The legal situation currently looks like this: the study programme is supposed to provide the student with certain knowledge, skills and social competencies (the sacred triad to which the learning outcomes of the course, the study programme and the syllabuses of the individual subjects are subordinate). I juxtapose this with a hypothetical situation: imagine a person in a wheelchair studying directing. Does anything stand in the way of them achieving the supposed learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and social competencies? No, apart from the architectural barriers they will encounter at university and in their career, nothing stands in the way.

Another hypothetical situation: a person has no hand and wants to study acting. Assuming they have acting potential, charisma and “that thing” that makes them catch the eye. Will the lack of a hand prevent them from acquiring the knowledge, skills and social competencies ascribed to an acting major? Certainly not. They will not be able to make a handstand in physical education classes, but this should not result in being struck off the student list. So the lack of a hand will be purely an aesthetic issue and this confronts us with another question: is our theatre and audience ready for the lack of hands to mean something only when this is the intention of the creators⁵?

4 Just to clarify: I am left-handed, I am proud of it, and the left side does not carry any negative connotations for me.

5 But when considering studying for a degree in puppet theatre acting – I would consider the lack of hands as a real obstacle to achieving the educational results. Aleksandra Gosławska, a student of acting, specialising in puppet theatre acting, in her monodrama *Stand-up* states: “I won’t be a puppeteer, my hands are too stiff”.

The evidence that the system is unravelling is that we are facing not only hypothetical situations but also completely real challenges. For the 2022/2023 recruitment cycle, a deaf person applied who wanted to take the directing exam. We were open to this possibility – the dean of the Directing Department Marta Miłoszewska took seriously the challenge of adapting the entrance exam for a d/Deaf person. This involved very specific problems, such as the lack of funding for the assistance of a Polish Sign Language interpreter. In the end, the person did not take the exam, but it triggered another question in my mind: what would have happened if a deaf person had taken up a degree in puppet theatre acting – thus developing new forms of non-verbal communication? Multilingualism is a hot topic in theatre arts research today. I see the presence of people with different disabilities as an opportunity and opening up a new field of the experience of communication – through a tool such as theatre. Marta Rau, Vice-Chancellor of the Białystok Branch, sees great potential for such explorations⁶.

When we say ‘people with disabilities’, the question automatically arises: do you have a ramp? Is the building accessible? And then I think to myself: architecture is a technical issue. Sooner or later we will find one solution or another. But the question “What theatre are we educating for?” pulses red and howls.

6 What serves as an inspiring example is the PSL translation of *Alice’s Wonderland* (*Alicji Kraina Czarów*, dir. Sławomir Narloch) staged at the National Theatre, which included the verbal, poetic and musical aspects of the performance.

Questions:

1. How do we see our role in the context of the diverse expectations, needs and abilities of those interested in our institution's offer? / What can we do to work with people with disabilities in our institution equitably and without thwarting the ambitions and expectations of all?

2. How do we respond in our institution to changes in society? What impact do these changes have on shaping our activities, offer, and conversations about the future?

3. How do we create space within the institution to discuss changes in its functioning so that it is widely accessible?

Kinga Chudobińska-Zdunik

Slowly. I need a pause because I can't keep up with you – a director on health-related slow motion

My name is Kinga Chudobińska-Zdunik and I have multiple sclerosis. I study directing at the Theatre Academy in Warsaw. I applied for this course, having already been diagnosed. I also knew that it would affect my studies – in my previous major I had to take medical leaves. However, I was convinced that, despite being ill, I would be able to study without telling anyone about my situation. It became apparent very quickly that I had to do this because I ended up in hospital. As time went by, I started to function slower and slower.

What is it like to live with multiple sclerosis? Seemingly obvious skills turn into challenges. First of all, cognitive functions weaken: concentration, memory, decision-making, perception. The senses lose their sharpness. All of this greatly interferes with daily functioning – I get tired quickly, I hang up and fall silent when speaking, I am slow in performing my activities. And all this is gradually intensifying.

What is it like to study directing with multiple sclerosis? Before the study programme changes that were introduced at the Theatre Academy in the academic year 2019/2020, it was a huge physical but also mental burden for me. I felt the pressure to act fast: I watched directors who were constantly rushing somewhere and entering the artistic team with enormous force, and I couldn't do that. However, the combination of the pandemic and the new university authorities brought many transformations, which for me meant a much greater comfort of studying.

Maja Kleczewska became the Dean of the Directing Department, new lecturers were hired, the curriculum and timetables were transformed. The approach to my situation was also different: I felt understanding and openness towards what I was facing. Łukasz Chotkowski, who joined the department, gave me courage to talk about my illness, using the language of theatre. No one tried to mould me into existing standards – through dialogue we sought solutions that would enable me to study. In turn, the pandemic allowed me to work in a domestic setting, which was extremely convenient in my situation.

During the pandemic, Agata Koszulińska, a fellow student in the year above, sent me an invitation to participate in her performance entitled *Filoktet ex Machina*, which was being produced at Teatr Powszechny with the participation of the actors from that theatre. She wanted me to talk about my illness and gave me complete freedom in this – my performance was to be a part of the play, which dealt with the theme of suffering, helplessness, death. Agata provided me with the working times and hours that suited my abilities, and even a couch to rest on. I felt her approval and willingness not to rush and to work in a way that everyone could keep up. I saw that rehearsals did not have to revolve around an individual and their artistic ambitions, on which the work of the whole team depended. Despite this slower pace, the performance premiered and everything worked out. This showed me that other ways of working on a performance are possible: you can do it without violence and squeezing the last bit of strength out of people, you can go slower, you can adapt to other people and their needs, you can be at ease.

This experience has inspired my own work as a director. I am in the process of working on my diploma, which will be about illness. I want to talk about the fact that it affects us all to some degree. Anyone can get ill, and yet for some reason we keep it away from ourselves, we are afraid of it. I believe that it is worth inviting people to talk about vulnerability, instead of pretending that the issue does not exist. If I had more energy, I would be running around with banners and speaking out about the disease and how it affects our functioning. I am grateful to everyone who has the energy to do this. But you can also support people with illness without banners. There are different ways to open up to the presence of those who cannot function according to the rules created for healthy people. I will create art even though I am not healthy.

Questions:

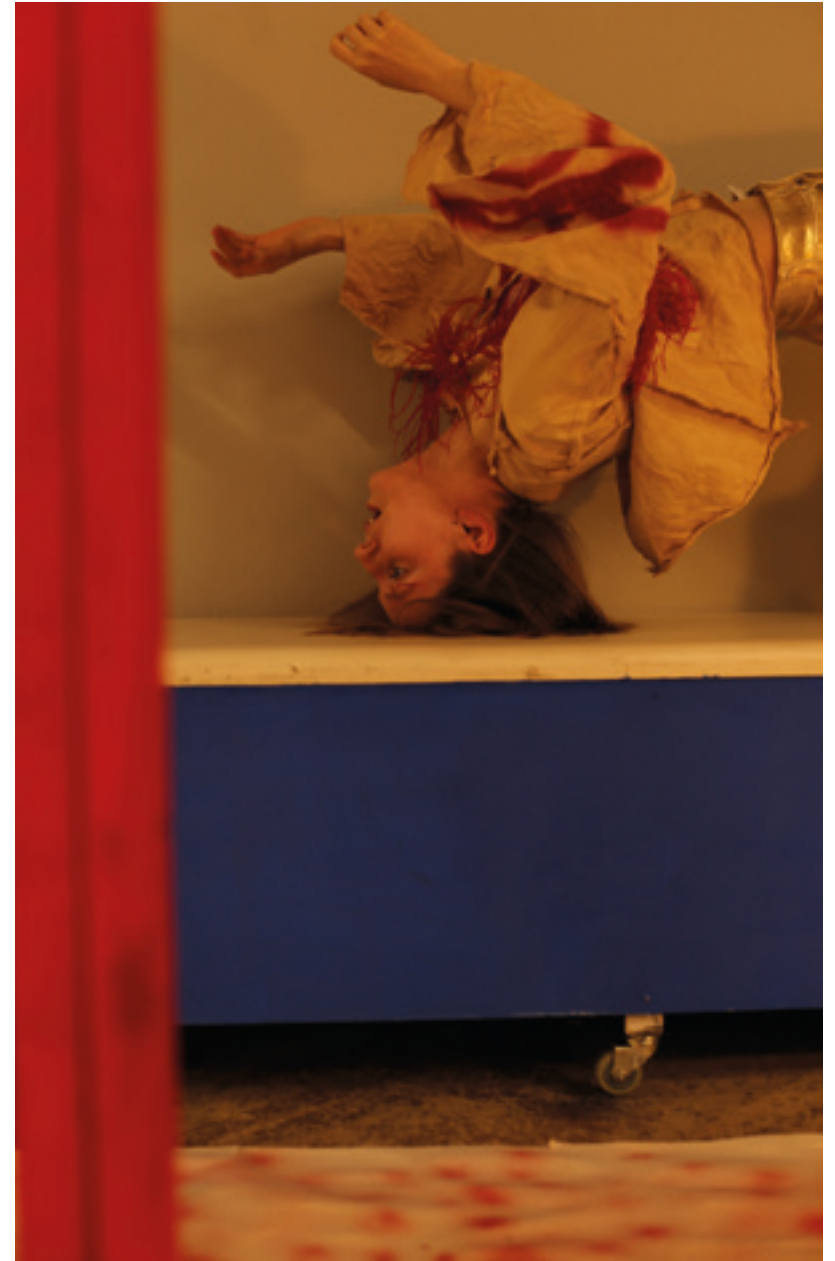
1. How can I take care of my needs in the workplace/learning environment? What conditions facilitate my development?

2. Which of my needs should others know about at the beginning of the cooperation, so that we can think together how to meet them?

3. How can I find out about my colleagues' needs related to the way they work?



Stage design for the performance *Ból (Pain)*. Photo by Agnieszka Dudziak.



A character in the performance *Ból (Pain)*. Photo by Agnieszka Dudziak.

Filip Pawlak

From sham to the real avant-garde – on the social responsibility of cultural institutions

I am a person with a disability. My left arm is a little shorter and handless – which is not a real problem in everyday life. And yet, because of the social model of understanding the body, I have felt that I am disabled. So I recognise disability as part of my identity.

The second major component of my identity is working in the cultural sphere – I would call myself a cultural labourer with a mission, who tries to bring to life what he believes in. I work in production and curatorial positions. I am not professionally involved in accessibility.

There is also a third component to my identity – I am gay.

And the fourth – I come from a working-class family who has given me a lot of support and acceptance. Nevertheless, my relatives and I were subjected to societal norms that often did not accept who I am and what I am like.

All these elements are closely intertwined: as a person with a disability and a gay man from a working-class family, I believed in cultural institutions – I looked for a second home in them, a place in the social space where I could feel fully at home. I was seduced by slogans about ideas and values, about expression and being oneself, about valuing sensitivity and about the community formed around the arts. I did not fit into many groups, but I felt there was a place for me in theatre. I invested all my sensibility and energy to be able to act in the sphere of culture and believed that I was creating a substitute for a society where I did not have to be ashamed of who I was. How many similarly excluded people treat cultural institutions as such a safe haven?

The reflections I would like to share are the result of observations emerging from the intersection of my experiences in two areas: being a person with a disability and, at the same time, a cultural labourer with a mission.

The law is the basis for functioning of all fields. So I will start by quoting the Constitution of the Republic of Poland.

Article 6: "The Republic of Poland shall provide conditions for the people's equal access to the products of culture which are the source of the Nation's identity, continuity and development."

Article 73.: "The freedom of artistic creation and to enjoy the products of culture, shall be ensured to everyone."

The Constitution thus assures cultural labourers that they are engaged in something very important. We have the responsibility of working for the nation. The details of our rights are regulated by laws and statutes. But how do all these guarantees work for people who do not fit the template: people with disabilities, but also queer people, immigrants...?

How do people with disabilities find themselves in all this? Is their (our) presence treated as a contribution? Is their (our) reflection on culture taken into account? I argue that there is potential in the presence of people with disabilities in cultural institutions to remind us of the basic ideas related to respecting the needs of other people - but because of the way the cultural ecosystem functions, they (we) may find themselves (ourselves) excluded or treated as objects.

How does this ecosystem work? I will discuss this using the example of theatres. From my perspective, theatres in Poland are institutions with a mission: an agora where we fight for the visibility of ideas. Performances such as *Klątwa (The Curse)*, *Golgota Picnic*, *Śmierć i dziewczyna (Death and the Maiden)* were commented on in the main editions of daily TV news - the importance of theatre in the debate is still high, despite the relatively small audience. The plays stimulate discussion, point out pressing issues, and are committed to finding answers to questions about our community, past and future. At the same time, at an organisational level, theatres operate between a lack of funding and the need to assert their own relevance. This fuels the overproduction of events, accelerates the pace of work and creates an arts ecosystem in which cultural labourers are under increasing pressure. This is confirmed by research findings that clearly indicate high levels of burnout in the cultural sector¹.

¹ Bartek Lis, Jakub Walczak "Wszecpracza i nadprodukcja w kulturze. Okołopandemiczne refleksje na marginesie badań pracowników i pracownic poznańskiego pola kultury", *Zarządzenie w Kulturze*, 2021, 22, vol. 2, pp. 141-157.

The appearance of a person with a disability inside theatre, in its production system that has been stretched to its limits, often becomes a pang of guilt. Along with us comes a reflection on whether the person can withstand the pressure and who we are actually showing on stage. It is a troublesome presence, reminding us of questions that have no place in the day-to-day rush: who is represented on stage? Can we adapt our rehearsal schedule to suit the individual needs of an artist? Is our space accessible? What does beauty on stage mean - is it only a white, cisgender, able-bodied figure? Are our internal practices consistent with what we declare in public? But also - aren't I myself tired of this run? The list of questions is much longer.

What people with disabilities can bring to the reflection on cultural institutions is a reminder that people of diverse sensibilities work there. Along with us also come our needs, reflection, sensibility. Of course, everyone has their own needs, yet far more often these are people with disabilities who trigger this kind of thinking and are able to fight for their rights, their pace, their conditions at work. This presence creates a dangerous crack in everyday life, because it challenges existing norms. It requires a reflection for which there is no space in everyday functioning (because we are preparing another premiere, because we are struggling to survive, because we can deal with it later - but now we have to defend ourselves against the world, because, after all, we have been doing it this way for years and it has been good).

The problems I list here are for me at the same time potentials for the transformation of established rules: they can trigger creative discussions and remind us of the values that should be at the core of cultural institutions. A turn towards change is possible because it has already happened with the COVID-19 pandemic or the #MeToo movement. They made it possible for institutions to finally stop for a moment and reflect on how they actually function.

However, there are still many areas left where the discussion has not yet taken place and they work according to the old mechanisms. Why is this happening? I think the reason lies in the fact that cultural institutions do not receive stable funding, they are dependent on grant programmes and they experience constant uncertainty. They are stuck in a defensive position, feeling insecure and unstable. How to develop a visionary approach in such conditions, how to find time to pause for reflection on the mission and its implementation? It is difficult to expect burned-out cultural institution employees to have the energy necessary to transform their workplaces.

The second reason, in my opinion, is the fear of change - incorporating new perspectives into thinking about the shape of institutions can revolutionise the way they operate. There are a lot of people working in theatres who are aware of the need for change - and yet the functioning of these institutions still focuses on producing a show and seeing theatre through the lens of the artistic team. An approach in which all theatre labourers are seen as a team with a specific mission and values - both at the level of the artistic message and the internal system of labour - is still rare.

I will conclude by referring to the component of my identity I mentioned at the beginning: I am a representative of the queer community. Looking at theatres from this perspective, I can be more optimistic - progressive institutions in this country have embraced one of the excluded groups as a full participant in the artistic debate. Queer theory and queer people have found their place on stages - in performances, aesthetics, reflection, theatre companies and criticism. And since it was possible to adopt this perspective, perhaps there is also space for a reflection on the crip perspective? Other groups that are invisible in the field of art are also waiting in line. I hope that in the future these issues that now arouse bitterness will be transformed: that in 300 years' time the exclusion of people with disabilities, the eating of animals, the cutting down of forests, the dead bodies of refugees at borders will be seen as being as dark a period in history as the times when we tolerated slavery, the lack of women's rights or ritual murder.

Questions:

1. Where do I see current systemic problems, mistakes, oversights in the cultural field in which I work?

2. How do current systemic solutions applied in culture affect my daily work in this field?

3. What specific systemic changes do I want to work towards? How can I get involved in making them a reality? Do I have the energy to do this?



Filip Pawlak helping assemble the scenery for the performance *Dzikość serca* (*Wildness of the Heart*) by Gry i Ludzie (Games and People) Theatre during a tour as part of Teatr Polska (Theatre Poland) - in the programme, he hosted meetings with the audience of this performance. Photo by Przemysław Jendroska.



The housing estate where Filip Pawlak lives. Photo by Filip Pawlak.



Filip Pawlak performing in the play *Niech nigdy w tym dniu słońce nie świeci* (*Let the Sun Never Shine on This Day*), Aleksander Fredro Theatre in Gniezno. Photo by Marek Lapis.

Dagmara Gumkowska

Strategies for inclusion

In this text I would like to introduce the activities undertaken to develop inclusivity at the OPEN THE DOOR International Festival organised by the Stanisław Wyspiański Silesian Theatre in Katowice. However, before going into specific examples, I would like to share my personal perspective on how I perceive theatre, as this is also reflected in the projects I am involved in.

For me, art – and therefore theatre – is a field of social debate, exchange of ideas, dialogue and expression. In this space there is room for everyone, regardless of their previous experience. I have the impression that this role of theatre is often underestimated, whereas, in my opinion, it opens up enormous possibilities for learning about the world, for noticing disturbing phenomena and confronting them, for encountering a different way of thinking, a different sensibility. All this creates an opportunity to break stereotypes. The stories we learn in theatre may be those of ‘others’, but the human dimension of the meeting makes us more inclined to open up to them, to try to understand them. It is harder to reject and cross out a person than a subject or an issue. Art, and especially, I think, the art of theatre, also has an invaluable dimension when it comes to working through traumas, including collective traumas related to historical experiences or social phenomena. Difficult topics (such as illness, death, disagreement with what is happening around us) can resound from the stage, making us aware that we are not alone in our attempts – sometimes, even often, unsuccessful ones – to deal with a phenomenon. Theatre can give us a sense of community, helping us to see ourselves among people facing similar difficulties and dramas.

Many of the Silesian Theatre's activities also correspond to this slogan. I would like to share a few examples of activities related to 'including artists with disabilities in the theatrical bloodstream'¹ and making the implemented activities accessible to people with different needs. A project that specifically represents these activities and the thinking described above is the OPEN THE DOOR International Festival, the first edition of which took place in 2018.

The OPEN THE DOOR festival has the form of a review, its programme is open to various theatrical and artistic forms. Guests have included artists from France, Spain, Mexico, Great Britain, the Czech Republic, Israel, Belarus, Ukraine, Chile, Kosovo, Belgium, Iceland and Poland. During the festival, we address the theme of exclusion and, above all, we try to be inclusive – to make the events available to the widest and most diverse audience possible.

Organising the festival, we pose a number of questions related to exclusion. What is exclusion? What can cause someone to be considered excluded or to feel excluded themselves? We show that exclusion affects many more people than we realise – what is more, it can also affect us, and it is not a phenomenon far removed from us.

There are, after all, various reasons for exclusion: disability, belonging to a minority, national, ethnic or religious group. Also beliefs or worldviews may lead to exclusion. The reasons for exclusion – or the feeling of exclusion – can also be age, illness, mental health problems, facing a difficult situation (loss of a loved one, difficulties in professional life, material problems). The modern world requires us to be constantly successful, to self-promote, to self-create, to constantly report the next exciting fact on social media. The gap between this created world and the experienced world is becoming too acute for many people. Our awareness of the many paths that lead to exclusion makes us want to remind festival audiences that the crisis can affect any of us.

However, the fundamental aim of addressing the topic of exclusion is to counteract it through inclusion. Confronting festival audiences with this issue can translate into building greater social awareness and, as a result, be the basis for change – if we become aware of the reason for the exclusion of a person or group, if we understand their needs, their situation, we can transform our perceptions and behaviour.

¹ The phrase was taken from the CFP issued by the organisers of the *Theatre as a Way to Inclusion* conference.

How do these assumptions translate into the practical activities undertaken as part of the OPEN THE DOOR festival? The inclusion strategy is implemented at various levels. I will list the most important of the solutions we have adopted:

- inclusion in the festival programme of performances made by artists with disabilities, artists from disadvantaged groups – we presented, for example, *For Now, I Am...* (in which choreographer Marc Brew tells his personal story of returning to the stage, having as a young dancer woken up in hospital paralysed after a car accident), *Louder Is Not Always Clearer* by Mr and Mrs Clark (in which performer Jonny Cotsen makes the audience aware of stereotypes about d/Deaf people), performances by Theatre 21;

- presentation of performances addressing important social issues (including the subject of exclusion), such as: *Popytka* (made by Veronica Fibich in collaboration with Chechen women who live in Poland and tell stories about their situation, about social reactions to 'women in headscarves'), *S/He Is Nancy Joe* by the Czech Tantehorse company (a performance dealing with gender identity, confinement in a discordant body), *Birdie* by the Spanish Agrupación Señor Serrano company (a performance combining video art and object animation to talk about migration as an inherent part of our lives);

- responding to the current situation and events in social life (examples include a project run with Ukrainian residents, which was presented as part of the opening of the 2022 festival, or the performance created by Jana Shostak, which addresses the protests of the people of Belarus);

- emphasising the artistic quality of projects carried out by artists with disabilities, stressing that these artists are legitimate citizens of the artistic world;

- presenting works by lesser-known or emerging artists together with performances by established artists and productions by repertory companies;

- broadening the offer – in order to discuss exclusion and inclusion with the widest and most diverse audience possible, we try to ensure the greatest possible variety of genres, including dance projects, contemporary circus art (such as Guillem Alba's poetic, wordless *Calma!*), open-air shows, and other open-air events (such as the French Compagnie Yann Lheureux's *Flagrant Délire*, which combines contemporary dance, parkour and classical music, or the stilt-dancing performances of the Spanish Maduixa company: *Mulier* about female identity and rituals, and *Migrare* about the stories of refugee women);

- responding to the risk of being 'intimidated' by contact with the institution (which can also lead to exclusion) - during the festival we emphasise 'opening the doors' of the institution, openness to new audiences and we break the economic barrier by introducing low ticket prices for the events;

- accessibility - we present performances with audio-description, translation into Polish Sign Language, as well as with Polish subtitles in the case of foreign productions and often also with English subtitles in the case of Polish productions (which also allows us to reach out to audiences who do not speak Polish);

- making trailers with Polish and English subtitles and with translation into Polish Sign Language;

- a programme that includes meetings with filmmakers, interviews.

The Silesian Theatre is also active in the field of inclusion outside the OPEN THE DOOR Festival. It creates projects related to the inclusion of people with disabilities - for example, the performance *Spójrz na mnie (Look at Me)* directed by Adam Zijski with the participation of blind people, which has stayed in repertoire for several seasons. In addition, the Silesian Theatre is currently implementing the 'Accessible Silesia' project which centres on the adaptation of the repertoire to the needs of d/Deaf and hearing impaired people. This involves, among other things, creating subtitles for 12 performances presented on the Main Stage and the production of performance trailers, which will be available on the website and social media with subtitles and translation into Polish Sign Language. The project is funded as part of the 'Culture without Barriers' project.

There are a number of challenges associated with taking action towards inclusivity in the broadest sense. These include architectural, economic and communication barriers, transport difficulties and the difficulty of reaching out with information about the offer to people with disabilities, and the fact that they have not developed a habit of attending cultural events as a result of encountering barriers for many years. Awareness of these challenges, however, causes mobilisation: we are constantly looking for new ways to reach out to audiences and increase accessibility. We consult with representatives of communities of people with disabilities, we try to find out what truly facilitates the reception of a performance, what needs might arise from different perceptual abilities. As a result, we are introducing new solutions - such as accessibility training for ushers and usherettes and theatre attendants. Of course, there is still much to be done: we are planning to renovate

the entrance to the theatre and auditorium entrances, which will facilitate access for people with reduced mobility.

All of these projects and choices stem from the belief that we are diverse and that the steps taken towards inclusivity and accessibility benefit all of us. Removing architectural barriers makes life easier for all of us - not just wheelchair users, but older people, parents and carers of children, people with any (including temporary) mobility impairments. We can also all benefit from the fact that as many people as possible will take an active part in social and cultural life, sharing their experiences and bringing in a new perspective. Inclusivity concerns all of us - and building this awareness is one of the important objectives of the OPEN THE DOOR festival.

Questions:

1. How do I understand the slogan "Theatre as a way to inclusion"? How can this field of art strengthen and expand the field of inclusion?

2. What change in inclusion awareness matters to me the most? What do I want others to know about?

3. How can I implement these findings in my / our organisation's activities?



Calma! by Guillem Albà, MFOTD 2020.
Photo by Przemysław Jendroska.



Mulier, Cia. Madaixa, MFOTD 2019.
Photo by Przemysław Jendroska.



For Now, I Am..., Marc Brew Company, MFOTD 2019.
Photo by Susan Hay.

Anna Rochowska

TR WITHOUT BARRIERS – broadening thinking about accessibility

Our path at TR Warszawa to accessibility was a narrow one at the beginning. I entered it as a theatre pedagogue – I was involved in various forms of work with the audience and activities in the field of theatre education. Thinking about audiences was fundamental to my daily tasks. However, I was keen to see people who had never visited TR Warszawa before, so I undertook activities related to developing the accessibility of our institution. Looking back, I can see that my pedagogical and theatrical experience helped me think about how to include these new and previously absent groups in the life of the theatre. We started with single simple activities, increased their scope and variety over time, and began to ensure their constant presence in the offer. Today, we are still moving towards accessibility, but our narrow path has turned into a multi-lane road. It is this broadening of our thinking about accessibility that I will talk about later in the text.

When we started the TR WITHOUT BARRIERS programme ten years ago, the first people with various disabilities came to the theatre. Performances themselves were made accessible, as we provided subtitles and audio descriptions; with time we also introduced translation into Polish Sign Language. We also invited people to take a touch tour of the scenery – we felt it was extremely important for the audience to find out about the stage design before seeing the performance, as the pauses between the dialogues in the audio description do not allow for an accurate description. It offered an opportunity to touch it, to get oriented in this space, to experience being in it. This form of working with the audience is often present in pedagogical and theatrical activities – we decided to go in a similar direction also with people with disabilities and started to invite them to workshops introducing them to performances. Workshops WITHOUT BARRIERS were actually

no different from any other meeting with the audience: we simply adapted them to the capabilities of people with different disabilities.... We very often brought diverse groups together – we then took care to adapt the course of activities and materials to their individual needs. This was the case, for example, during the workshops accompanying Krzysztof Warlikowski's production of *Cleansed (Oczyszczeni)*. The performance began with a monologue about love from Sarah Kane's *Crave*, which we wanted to use during the workshop for a shared performative reading – so we prepared copies of the text also in Braille... This enabled us to bring together sighted, blind and deaf people. In 2015, we decided for the first time to do a longer theatrical process: to run a week-long holiday theatre workshop for a group consisting of people with and without visual impairments. I invited Maciek Adamczyk and Katarzyna Pawłowska, i.e. Porywacze Ciał (The Body Snatchers) Theatre, to run the classes. We felt ready to implement larger accessibility projects.

Accessibility was event-based at first. Once a month there was a performance accompanied by audio description and subtitles. If people interested in a particular title did not see it on a particular day, the chance to see the performance at another time was irretrievably lost. A change in our approach only came during the pandemic. When we were all confined to our homes and access to the theatre was restricted, I realised what it meant to have no choice – and from then on I was keen that our audiences with disabilities should have that choice as much as anyone else. Presenting the performances online showed us that we have Polish subtitles and audio description for all our titles. So we were ready to make accessibility of performances an everyday feature of TR Warszawa. This is what happened in the 2021/22 season: in each round of staging a given play, one performance was subtitled and audio described.

The area of accessibility was my additional job at the theatre – my day-to-day responsibility was primarily to manage the theatre education team. Accessibility tasks therefore came second, having to wait until I had time to get involved. I always managed to find some, but it was never a full-time job. When I started work at the Theatre Institute in 2022, the accessibility tasks were taken over by Aleksandra Rogalska and she started working as accessibility coordinator. Thanks to her work and the fact that she is able to devote her full attention to accessibility issues, all initiatives in this area have become more visible – what may serve as great examples of this are: our website with ETR descriptions and the format of videos promoting performances with audio description and translation into Polish Sign Language.

Nowadays, we use audio description and PSL translation not only for performances, but also for individual events of other kinds (such as an open rehearsal for a performance or a performative reading). In this way, we want to build a new standard in which every person can participate in our events.

So far I have talked about accessibility in the context of TR Warszawa's audience. Since the appearance of the play *Rodzina (Family)* in our repertoire, we can also talk about inclusion on stage. We hope that the co-production of Theatre 21 and TR Warszawa will become the beginning of a wider cooperation between our companies. The actors of TR Warszawa are happy to play with the actors of Theatre 21. During joint rehearsals, the slogan "TR 21 Theatre" emerged, which best reflects the level of integration of our teams.

In discussions about accessibility, the problem of the institution's lack of readiness for these kinds of actions often recurs. I agree that it takes years to build accessibility in a team – it has taken TR ten years. You could say that's a long time, but what's important to me is above all that this change has happened. Today, I am not alone on the path of accessibility – the whole team walk with me. We have reached a place where no one is asking the questions: "Why do we need to do this?" or "Are you sure we have enough money?" We are at a stage where we can talk at the first rehearsal of each new production about including subtitles in the set design and a convenient space for PSL interpreters. We want to continue broadening our thinking about inclusion. We are looking for new solutions – ones that will help us provide comfort to everyone who wants to visit us.



A photograph taken during the touch tour. Audience members explore the stage design and props used in the performance. Photo by Malwina Szumacher.



A photograph taken during the Warsaw Week of Culture Without Barriers in 2013; it shows audience members waiting in the foyer of the theatre to watch the performance *Celebration*. In the foreground, one of the visually impaired audience members is holding a white cane. Photo by Darek Senkowski.



A photograph taken during the introductory workshop to a performance. It shows two people sitting next to each other laughing: workshop leader Anna Rochowska and one of the participants - a student of the Educational Centre in Laski. Photo by Aleksandra Rogalska.

Igor Stokfiszewski

Institution and its community. Programming activities based on values and needs

Social cultural institutions are cultural organisations that have publicly accessible venues and carry out their programmes in them. The topic I want to address concerns the programming of the activities of such institutions based on a participatory approach. My point of reference will be the experiences that concern the JASNA 10 Social Cultural Institution run by Krytyka Polityczna in Warsaw.

After 2012 - that is, since the closure of the Brave New World (Nowy Wspaniały Świat) Cultural Centre - Krytyka Polityczna did not carry out institutionalised cultural activity in Warsaw. During this time, we focused on cultural research and practices implemented outside our organisation (including the work with the community of the Ursus district of Warsaw, led by Jaśmina Wójcik). JASNA 10 was established in 2020 with the aim of building and developing an audience. The then curator of the place, Wojciech Zrałek-Kossakowski, proposed an original programme. Its main idea was to create a place that would be a site for collaboration of a consortium of organisations. So we invited foundations to cooperate with us: Strefa Wolności, Automatophone, KEM as well as the Widok Foundation for Visual Culture and the Kalecki Foundation.

As part of the consortium, from 2020 to 2022 we implemented a programme that included exhibitions and concerts, art and activist education programmes, and activities addressing climate change, urban space and policies that take into account more than just human beings. Each of the organisations that contributed to the centre had its own area of activity. Strefa Wolności ran the Open Institute with migrants, refugees and people who work with such communities in mind. KEM School addressed its offer to people from the LGBTQ+ community. The Automatophone programme engaged the Deaf community.

In defining the community of JASNA 10, we drew on a wide variety of sources and methods: since the centre's establishment, we have conducted participatory observation and collected feedback (in face-to-face conversations, through social networks and surveys from people who have contributed to the centre's programme to date and who have participated in our activities). On this basis, we have defined the community of JASNA 10 as two main groups:

- creators of culture, socially engaged artists, who - because of their identity, their views, the problems they address in their work or the communities with whom they work - have limited space for expression in connection with the process of washing out progressive content from the programmes of the largest art institutions in Warsaw;
- representatives of communities and groups functioning on the margins of society or under political pressure, i.e. LGBTQ+ people, women, migrants and refugees, Deaf people and other minorities.

In 2022, Krytyka Polityczna began developing the programme of JASNA 10 for the next four years. The starting point this time was not a programme idea based on our competencies related to existing cultural trends, but an analysis of our communities and their needs, and the question of with which new communities we would like to develop the institution. This choice was dictated by two factors. The first one related to our own research resulting from our participation in public life and the activities of social movements: we became familiar with the expectations and demands of marginalised or discriminated against communities. The second one was the result of becoming familiar with research indicating social groups that need to be strengthened or that are excluded from culture due to the lack of a cultural offer addressed to them¹. As a result, we turned our attention to the following communities:

- post-migrants (second and further generations of people with a migrant background who were born and grew up in Poland), with a particular focus on Afro-Polish people;
- migrant and refugee communities from Africa (including those who do not speak Polish);
- the migrant community (of nearly ten thousand people) that does not speak Polish or speaks it poorly;

¹ We gained knowledge of the second factor through research carried out for the City of Warsaw, which adopted the following policies: the 'Social Diversity Policy' (2022) and the 'Warsaw of Many Cultures' cultural policy (2020), and the 'Relationships and Differences' report, which looks into the participation of Warsaw residents in culture (2017).

- individuals characterised by neurodiversity (such as those on the autism spectrum);
- persons who are physically diverse (such as fat people or those with other physical characteristics that fall outside the cultural norm);
- organisations and social movements (especially of the young generation) in need of institutional support;
- adolescents (especially girls and non-binary youth) and young people (of university age and under 30 years of age);
- people from smaller towns in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship (including migrants and refugees);
- Poland-wide online community and international online communities;
- the "non-human" inhabitants of Warsaw - animals, plants, the water system and other subjects that belong to the city's natural ecosystem.

Identifying the communities of the JASNA 10 centre allowed us to analyse their needs. On this basis, we created a consortium of eight organisations selected precisely in terms of the communities they come from and work with. Each organisation focuses on a different area. Krytyka Polityczna is responsible for working with artists who come from or work with discriminated minority groups and with the young generation of social movements and organisations. Strefa WolnoSłowa cooperates with migrants and refugees and people who work with these groups, especially in small towns in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship. They carry out their programme in four languages: Polish, Ukrainian, Belarusian and English. Automatophone focuses on cooperation with Deaf artists and activities addressed to the Deaf community. KEM invites artists from the LGBTQ+ community and runs activities to strengthen the community. Widok has been implementing an online programme in English. Szajn works with teenagers, particularly girls and non-binary people, and with people on the autism spectrum. Zakole works with the multi-species community. The Alliance for Black Justice in Poland (an alliance bringing together the Black is Polish collective, the Family Voices Association of Multi-ethnic Families, the Centre for Intersectional Justice, the 'new visions' organisation and the Foundation for Social Diversity) is responsible for working with Afro-Polish people and the migrant and refugee communities of people of African descent. Their programme is also carried out in English.

On the basis of the process described above and the experience of running the JASNA 10 Social Cultural Institution, I see the tasks of curating the programme in a new way. They are no longer focused on managing artistic

activities on the basis of observation of the art field – they are now primarily concerned with managing social change on the basis of an in-depth recognition of the needs of audiences of cultural events.

Questions:

1. What methods can we use to receive feedback on our performance from the community of our institution?

2. Which communities in our surroundings do not have their space within public cultural institutions?

3. What organisations can be our partners in building relationships with these communities?



The opening of the exhibition of the 100LESB.COM project by Katarzyna Szenajch and Aleksandra Kamińska as part of the Creative Communities Support Programme. Photo by Paulina Czarnecka.



The generative somatics workshop ran by Margaret Amaka Ohia-Nowak as part of the Generation Change programme to strengthen the organisations and social movements of the young generation. Photo by Agata Kubis.



The debate "Between Body-Positivity and Self-Modification" as part of the CiałoStanowie- nie series. Photo by Agata Kubis.

Anna Żórawska Robert Więckowski

The only way – accessibility

The Culture Without Barriers Foundation works for culture which should be accessible to all people who cannot imagine life without it. We have been running it since 2012 to respond to the needs of people who are interested in the top of Maslow's pyramid – who, as a result of a deterioration of their fitness or a temporary disability, have lost access to culture or want to start discovering it in its entirety, because they did not have this opportunity before.

This is the climate we have

"This is the climate we have" means "that is just the way it is". You lose fitness – you lose access to culture – that was the reality back at the turn of the 20th century. But we did not want to accept this. What was it like for us?

Robert Więckowski: Towards the end of my studies I lost my sight and I lost culture. At the time, I stood in front of the blackboard in my Polish studies class and thought "Gee, I can't see what it says, absolutely, absolutely nothing".

This was not the end of the surprises – it turned out that culture actually had nothing to offer me. Books remained, but I did not even know how to read them. Disability always comes too early and you are not prepared for it. So I wanted to learn it *post factum*. I started hanging out among people who can't see and asking: "Listen, which way to culture?". And they'd say, "There's no way"... I'd ask: "When did you go to the theatre?" and I'd hear "I don't go there because it's invisible to me, because there's nothing there for me. I went there when I was at school because they used to take us there, and now with my family I don't go". That was the way it was. That was the climate we had.

Anna Żórawska: I was 22 years old, it was 2007, when I came across Agnieszka Labisko's article *Hear the Invisible (Usłyszeć niewidome)*, in which she wrote about the first film screening for the blind in Białystok. I grabbed my head: "What do you mean the first! This is the 21st century!" I started looking for information on the Internet to see if that was really true. It turned out that it was. As a young non-disabled girl, I found it unfair: I can

choose from a range of cultural activities, while there are a number of people who don't have that choice because they cannot see, cannot hear, they are in a wheelchair, they are on the autism spectrum.... I decided that I was going to work for accessibility – although I did not use that word yet at the time. I simply tried to make it possible for people with disabilities to go to the cinema or theatre. In 2008, after a lot of hardship and unpleasant words from many people, I organised the first screening at the Muranów Cinema. There were crowds! In 2009, I started cooperation with the National Theatre in Warsaw – the first performances with audio description and subtitles appeared. I was worried at the beginning whether there would be an audience interested in such an offer. But needlessly so: from the start, tickets sold out like hot cakes. As time went on, more and more theatres wanted to use the funds I was able to raise.

The climate we have now is such that we are no longer talking about accessibility only in the context of theatres, but simply of culture. Accessibility is becoming a given – not yet everywhere, not yet for everyone, not with every title, not at every organisation. But thanks to the fact that there are laws that support inclusion and the money that goes with them and, above all, there are people who believe that access to culture is important and who have the necessary competencies – we are already in a very different reality today than we were two decades ago.

This is the perspective we have

It used to be that fundraising involved a great deal of effort and uncertainty: we would go and ask, we would submit applications to the minister with a trembling heart, uncertain as to whether our intentions would be understood. Sometimes we succeeded, sometimes not. Cultural institutions were keen to use the funds we raised, but did not try to raise them themselves. One of the first institutions in Poland to do so was the Zachęta National Art Gallery (Paulina Celińska and director Hanna Wróblewska). Other galleries soon followed! Today we do not have to and do not want to take on this responsibility of raising funds for institutions. This field is supported by laws that place obligations on public institutions in this regard. This motivates organisations to manage accessibility wisely, thanks to which they can receive more subsidies. In this sense, accessibility has become profitable. What is more: it is even possible to make money on it, as centres with the right infrastructure (such as ramps, induction loops) can rent out their spaces for events where accessibility is a requirement. The prestige of the

institution can also be built on accessibility – it is still regarded as an innovative activity. You can join the leaders of change or lag behind.

And while there are still many issues that need to be addressed, looking back today, we can see how much has changed in just under 20 years. This allows us to look to the future with hope and expect it to bring further changes. And the prospects for this are promising: urban and international policies now speak of the importance of diversity and announce an increase in funding for accessibility. Subjects and courses that teach how to work with neurodiverse people and implement accessibility are emerging in academic education. Global trends on social responsibility and diversity such as ESG or DEI/D&I are visible in business. Companies are interested in learning how to work with and recruit people with disabilities. Generation Z is growing up and they do not want superficial measures. This change can no longer be stopped. Accessibility can only expand to new places, institutions, people, areas...

This is the audience we have

We mentioned our beginnings: the audience (who thought there was nothing for them in the offer of cultural institutions due to barriers) and the organisers (who feared that accessible events would not find an audience). What is it like today? The Culture without Barriers Festival is attended by several thousand people who are also active consumers and recipients of culture on a daily basis. What kind of audience is this? First and foremost, these are people with various disabilities. Among them, a group of self-advocates has developed (and there will be more and more of them). Activists who see the value in accessibility are also emerging. It is worth doing. Many people who work in culture believe in accessibility. They feel it is needed, they are learning it and using it in their organisations.

According to figures from the Statistics Poland, today one in five Poles is over the age of 60. For this reason alone, accessibility will become increasingly important for our society. Former director of the Museum of Modern Art, Marcel Andino Velez, emphasises that many of us are or will soon be the carers of our parents or other relatives, and this experience should not invalidate our right to participate in culture. It is also useful to see the work on accessibility in the perspective of our own future: what we design today we may need ourselves some time from now. All the changes that are happening now make this transformation unstoppable. Accessibility really is... the only way.

Questions:

1. Where are we today on the path to accessibility? What is our role at this stage of the route?

2. What do we see behind us from this point – what achievements and changes can we be proud of today?

3. What lies ahead – what reality should we prepare for today?



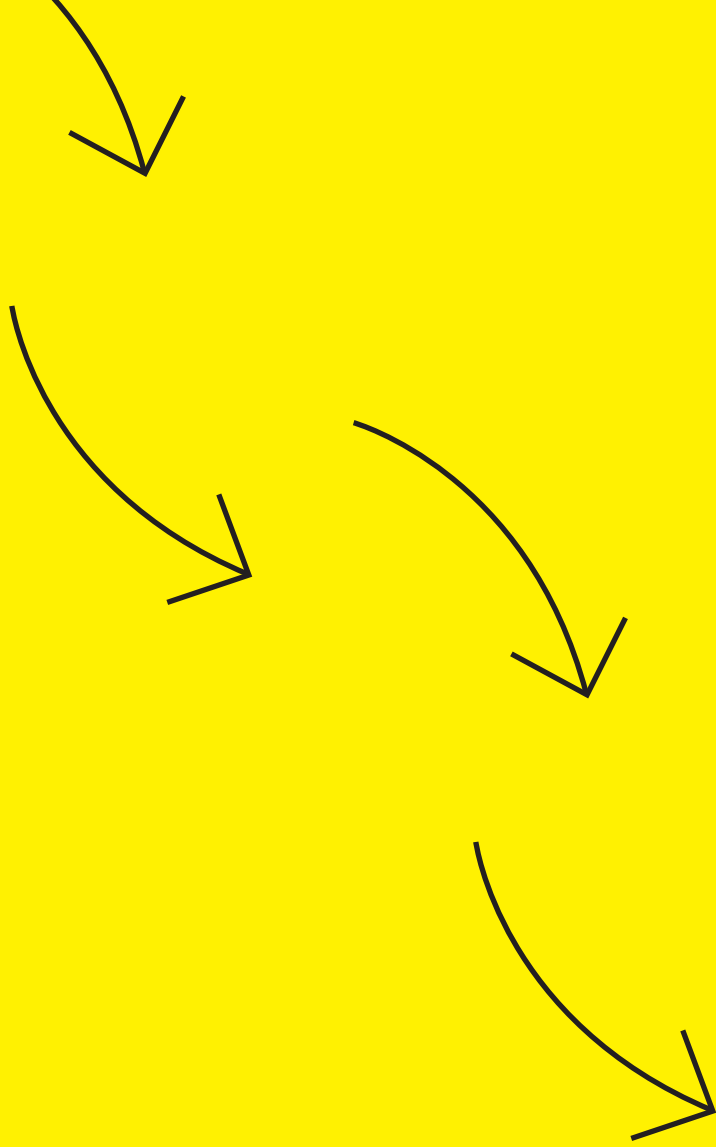
A meeting with Anna Goc, the author of the book *Głusza*. Photo by Piotr Kruszek.



The press conference at the 10th edition of the Culture Without Barriers Festival. Photo by Magda Pawluczuk.



The audience attending the concert of Czesław Śpiewa. The event took place as part of the Culture Without Barriers Festival and was translated into Polish Sign Language. Photo by Piotr Kruszek.



Instead of
a conclusion

Developing a dialogue - about the interactive exhibition "3 IN"

When, as part of the research group for "Be IN!", we were looking for a concept for the "3 IN" exhibition, we decided that it should give visitors an opportunity to engage in a dialogue about theatre by actors with otherness.

From one point of view, this was a logical decision. The main task of our ten-person research team throughout the project was to develop the discussion: we met with the audience after the performances, moderated the debates and conversations with the artists during which people shared their experiences, conducted workshops, and recorded interviews. During the meetings, those face-to-face as well as those taking place online, we tried to popularise nine Socratic questions that trigger key themes related to the theatre made by actors with otherness. So you could say that opening up and having a dialogue were our mission from the very beginning. Therefore, what other projects should we be working on during the exhibition, the finale of the two-year collaboration between Blue Apple Theatre, Theatre 21, Aldente Theatre, and the non-profit organisation Rhythm?

And yet, from another point of view, the decision to hold a dialogue on theatre and inclusion through the exhibition was not obvious. On the timeline of the project, this event only appeared at the very end – hence the natural solution was that the exhibition should document the collaboration, and bear witness to the progress of the project. Nevertheless, as a group, we set ourselves a task, the solution to which we had yet to discover: how to continue the dialogue through an exhibition? In the following paragraphs, I will present some of the strategies we adopted, describing selected parts of the "3 IN" exhibition.

Nine Socratic questions formed the core of the exhibition (a full list of these can be found at the end of the text). Over the course of the project, we collected material for each of them. Working on the exhibition was primarily about finding different ways of processing and presenting this content so that it could speak to visitors as artefacts arranged in the space of the cafe Za sklem (eng. Behind the Glass).

One of the Socratic questions we have coined relates to the problem of representation: what may be the result of casting an actor with otherness in a role that we all know and therefore associate with it some images and expectations? What meaning can this communicate? At the exhibition, visitors were able to reflect on this question by playing with projections. In the small room, a projector displayed the first two frames of a comic strip on the wall (images 1 and 2). The final, third frame was displayed on an old type of a slide projector (one that features a system of mirrors and lenses that magnifies and displays slides inserted into it). Visitors could create their own frames: they could use various elements, such as the faces of the twelve actors from the theatres participating in the project and a set of props and costume pieces specific to the role. By attaching an element to a portrait, each participant in the exhibition could check what, for example, Václav Šarközy (an actor from Aldente Theatre) might look like as James Bond (photo 3).

In the exhibition, we also asked questions about whether theatre allows actors with otherness to raise important issues on stage and about the influence of artists with otherness on the choice of the topic of a particular show. To address these questions, we created a video loop, assembling selected excerpts from two documentaries that showed the work of Theatre 21 (*The Revolution That Wasn't There*) and Theatre Aldente (*We Are Not Down*) respectively, and a video of analytical and dramaturgical discussions of the novel *Frankenstein* staged by Blue Apple actors (the video was made to be used in the performance *Frankenstein* as a back projection). The combination of shots and stills from each video highlighted both similarities and differences between the three ensembles. It also served as a keyhole view into the rehearsal room and the daily life of the ensembles. The resulting film complemented the questions we posed with a sequence of scenes in which performers with otherness express themselves creatively and intellectually in authentic life situations.

With another question, we invited people to think about the relationship of the theatre made by people with otherness to therapy. In the exhibition,

we linked this theme to Theatre 21's production *Trolls*. A group of actors in hairy masks (representing a clan of trolls) come to primary schools to perform a play in the classroom. The gradually developing interaction with the audience (looking out from behind potted plants, shaking hands, and guiding the audience to singing together at the back of the classroom on the carpet) leads to a group where actors and audience, trolls and humans, are together and sit joyfully in one circle. Only at the very end, after bonding, do the actors take off their masks and then the audience, who hadn't thought about it before, find out which of the actors have Down's syndrome and which don't. The show is based on a simple and powerful metaphor — people hear a lot of strange and critical stories about trolls, but few have actually met a troll.

For the exhibition, we made a troll mask and placed it in a partially separate lounge in the exhibition space: the Troll Room. Here, the visitor could sit at a school desk and listen to a short audio recording. The voice in the first recording talked about people's stereotypical perception of trolls, and in the end invited the visitor to transform into a troll if they wished. They were provided with a mask placed on the head of a mannequin (photo 4), as well as an mp3 player with the second audio track. It provided an introduction to the troll world, and a description of the trolls' relationship with their ancestors and humans. The visitor was guided between two mirrors (photo 5) that multiplied his or her reflection, allowing the new troll's body to be viewed from all sides. Simple tasks (e.g. waving to the people, hugging them, hiding behind a plant, and watching people moving around the exhibition), performed to Sebastian Świąder's music from *Trolls*, helped the person who has turned into a troll to immerse himself or herself in the experience while transforming him or her into a performer for other visitors to the exhibition (photo 6). In this way, our exhibition had a participatory character.

One of the subsequent questions was whether it was possible to apply the same standards to critical reflection on the theatre by actors with otherness as to any other theatre. To trigger a discussion on this question, we wrote and recorded a twelve-minute radio play. Five pairs of headphones were placed in the exhibition space so that participants could listen to it in small groups.

The radio play *The Theatre that Embraces* takes us to a performance by the fictional international company Theatre Speciál (Divadlo Speciál). The main character, the critic Barbara, intends to write a review of the performance but has zero experience with this type of theatre. In the script,

Barbara's short dialogues with the audience on the left and the audience on the right are interspersed with the voice of her thoughts. In an internal monologue, she comments on what she sees, trying to make sense of a completely new situation. We have constructed the plot of the performance Barbara is watching out of excerpts from the performances by the theatres that participated in the project. A key moment is when the actors of Theatre Speciál descend from the stage and offer a hug to the spectators. This brings the initially reticent Barbara to tears. The play ends with the critic trying to write the first sentence of her review. It is a short radio anecdote about the intricacies search for a relationship with what is distant and new to us. Due to the difficulty of the main plot and the linguistic and cultural nuances, the script of *The Theatre that Embraces* was the only part of the exhibition written entirely in Czech.

The exhibition also included an edition of a fictional newspaper *Daily In(clusive)!*, which visitors could take with them. It consisted of statements and accounts obtained from recorded discussions and individual interviews with the audience and artists. For each of the Socratic questions, we selected excerpts from the most thought-provoking opinions and reactions that the research group collected. An electronic version of the paper and the entire exhibition can be found online. To finish, I would like to invite you to take a virtual tour of the project website:

<https://beintheatres.com/>



Šimon Peták, creative research group lecturer and curator of the exhibition "3 IN".

Socratic questions

1. Is going to theatre performances by actors with otherness a search for an artistic experience or a kind of support for them?

When I go to the theatre, I expect to get something from the actors – a story, entertainment, charming moments, something to think about... I also expect to give something to the actors - my attention, my reaction, to reward them with applause in the end. What proportion between what I get and what I give do I expect when I go to the theatre by actors with otherness? Are they there for me, or am I there for them?

2. Is it OK for a serious character (such as Hamlet) to be played by an actor with otherness? Is it OK for an actor without any disability to play a character with a disability?

It is common in theatre for an actor to portray someone else; someone they are not. Are there any boundaries that should not be crossed?

3. Does theatre allow actors with otherness resulting from their disability to raise important human and social issues on stage?

In theatre, we sometimes raise important issues. For example: who has power over others and why? Who is right and who is wrong? Who is guilty and who is innocent? Are emotions or responsibilities more important? And so on... Can such questions appeal to me when they are posed by actors with disabilities?

4. What does an artist with a disability have to say about the choice of the topic? Is his or her voice necessary, or is it better to leave the choice to people without disabilities who can better judge the difficulty of the topic?

Choosing what a theatre company will stage is usually a complex decision and many things have to be taken into account: what the actors are like, what roles they are suited to, what interests them and what interests the director, what is currently happening in society... How can or should artists with otherness be involved in such a process?

5. Should the audience check during the performance what they are laughing at – the actor or their performance?

What is laughter and what is mockery? Does the perception of these categories differ between theatre productions involving actors with otherness and productions in mainstream theatres?

6. Is theatre with actors with otherness a form of art or therapy? And if therapy, then for whom?

Let's consider the reasons that might drive people to create a theatre performance. Why do they do it at all? And what reasons might actors with otherness have? Are they the same or different?

7. Is it OK for an actor with a disability to perform on stage with a professional actor without a disability? Does this allow them to give a full performance?

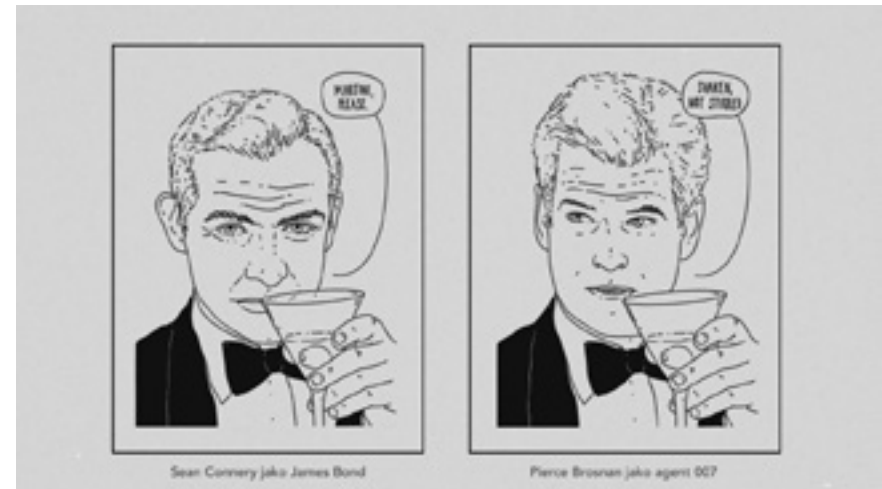
Acting is not just about giving your own performance. It's also about acting together, being a partner. What does it mean to have a partner with a disability on stage?

8. Can the same aesthetic standards be applied to theatre reviews of performances by actors with otherness as to a review of any other performance?

If someone asks me after a performance "Was it good?", do I then judge the theatre of actors with otherness as I would any other performance, or do I take into account other aspects?

9. Should the admission requirements for theatres and drama schools be set in such a way that they allow, for example, people with Down's syndrome to pass the recruitment procedure?

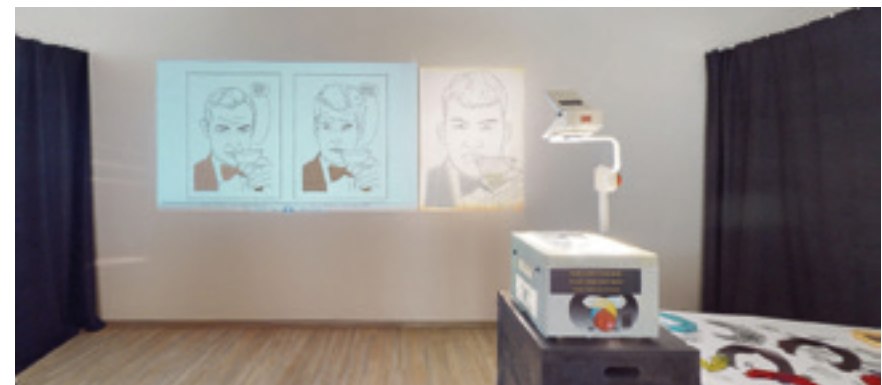
It is not necessary to have a degree in acting to become an actor. However, professional actors and actresses usually graduate from a theatre school. Should people with disabilities also have the opportunity to study acting?



Photograph 1. Author's materials.



Photograph 2. Author's materials



Photograph 3. Graphic from the 3D projection of the exhibition.



Photograph 4. Photo by Wiktoria Siedlecka-Dorosz.



Photograph 5. Photo by Wiktoria Siedlecka-Dorosz.



Photograph 6. Photo by Wiktoria Siedlecka-Dorosz.

**Biographies
of the authors**

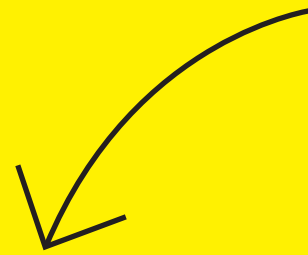




Photo: Monika Ciało

Agnieszka Piasecka

A graduate of cultural studies with a specialisation in theatre studies at the University of Łódź. She completed postgraduate studies in art therapy, pedagogy and oligofrenopedagogy, as well as numerous courses in the practical use of theatre and drama methods. Since 1995 she has been the artistic director of the International Biennial Theatre Meetings "Theatre and Therapy" organised by the Polesie Art Centre in Łódź. She is the author of many texts on the theatre of excluded people and co-editor of the following books *Wokół problematyki teatru ludzi niepełnosprawnych (Therapy and Theatre. Theatre of Disabled People)*, *Spektakl jako wydarzenie i doświadczenie (Spectacle as an Event and Experience)*. In 2010–2012 she coordinated training projects funded by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and implemented by the Voivodeship Centre for Cultural Animation in Toruń: PLUS Theatre, PLUS 2.0 Theatre, PLUS MINUS Theatre. Since 2014 she has been running the Ajanta Development Centre in Toruń. Since 2017, she has been working with the Dorotkowo Foundation as the artistic director of the theatre "YES or NO?", where she directed performances in collaboration with other artists: *Czy można pokochać mnie? (Can I Be Loved?)*, *Sen o dobrych kolegach (A Dream of Good Friends)*, and *Klub Cierpliwych (Patient People's Club)*.



Photo: Pep Alcaniz

Erdmute Sobaszek

Born in (East) Germany, she has lived in Poland since 1977. She completed her studies in pedagogy and cultural studies at the College of Education in Olsztyn. A co-founder of Węgajty Theatre in 1986, she has – as an actress and instrumentalist – played roles in and provided musical accompaniment to most Węgajty performances and two of her own productions. She also works as a theatre pedagogue – e.g. a co-leader of the workshops of the Inna Szkoła Teatralna (A Different Theatre School) of Węgajty Theatre. For many years she has been a manager of cultural and educational projects of Węgajty Theatre and an author of pedagogical and theatre projects and networking activities for local initiatives. She translates from German.



Photo Karolina Wiktor

Karolina Wiktor

Visual artist, author, event manager, and graduate of painting at the Institute of Visual Arts at the University of Zielona Góra. Between 2001 and 2013, together with Aleksandra Kubiak, she was part of the performance duo *Sędzia Główny* (Chief Judge). The works of *Sędzia Główny* can be found in many collections in Poland (including the National Museum in Warsaw; the Museum of Art in Łódź; the Zachęta National Gallery of Art). The duo was awarded the *Telewizja Kultura* prize in 2006 and a prize at the International Performance Festival in Trento, Italy, in 2007. In August 2009, a ruptured aneurysm and two strokes resulted in a complete turnaround in her career. Currently, she works extensively in the field of visual and concrete poetry, and since 2014 she has been creating the educational and cultural conference and workshop *Culture and Neuroscience* at the Zachęta National Gallery of Art. In 2017, she was awarded the Katarzyna Kobro Prize, and a year later she was awarded a scholarship by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage. She is active in raising public awareness of neurological diseases (mainly stroke and Aphasia) in everyday life. She is the author of the blogs www.afazja.blogspot.com and www.poezjawizualna.blogspot.com. She described her experiences in the poetic book *Wołga przez Afazję* (*A Volga Road Trip across Aphasia*). Her second book is the graphic poem *Pusto-stan nienawiści* (*Empty-ness of Hatred*).



Photo Mike Hall

Richard Conlon

Artistic Director at Blue Apple Theatre. Richard has been directing and writing plays since his experiences with a youth theatre in the 1980s. In his work with Blue Apple Richard tries to marry the simple idea of entertaining an audience whilst saying something complex about who we are, where we have come from, where we are going and how we live together. Richard remains doggedly committed to the notion that producing art together makes the world a better place and make us all more well-rounded human beings. He enters every creative process on the understanding that he will learn as much as everyone else in the rehearsal room.



Anna Brisbane

Performer at Blue Apple Theatre. Anna joined Blue Apple Theatre when it started in 2005. She has been in almost 30 productions beginning with small parts and progressing onto leading roles in *The Government Inspector*, *A Christmas Carol*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Tempest*. Anna is an integral part of the Blue Apple Core company that, amongst other things, devised the play *Living Without Fear* that explored difficult aspects of independent living, such as bullying and hate crime. The play toured schools and colleges and was used in police training, and she says that her highlight was when it was performed at the House of Commons. She also toured with *Hamlet* and *Much Ado* to various venues throughout England and the Channel Isles. Anna says she especially enjoys the touring side of Blue Apple: "You get to experience different venues and find out how to adapt your show for different theatre spaces, and it is always fun to travel to new places." She says that Blue Apple has helped boost her confidence, to get voluntary work, and not to be afraid to try new things. Outside Blue Apple, Anna is an active member of WAAFA (Winchester Area Access For All) and does volunteer work at the Royal Hampshire County Hospital. She is also a keen swimmer and tap dancer. Anna is also the current chair of the Apple Talk representative forum for Blue Apple participants.



Chris Pearce

Volunteer at Blue Apple Theatre. Chris Pearce has been a regular volunteer for 13 years with the Main Company in Winchester, providing support during rehearsals, on stage, on tour and backstage and he has also supported individual projects that have taken Blue Apple Core much further afield - including to the USA in April 2018. Chris has a background in care work and volunteering with many charities that support people of all ages and abilities. Chris claims that Blue Apple Theatre has become a very important part of his life. He says that Blue Apple is a tribute to believing in people's ability to achieve anything to which we put our minds.



Katie Appleford

Performer at Blue Apple Theatre. Katie joined Blue Apple Theatre in 2012. She has been in 23 productions, beginning with small parts and progressing onto leading roles in *The Railway Children*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Macbeth* and *Lashings of Ginger Beer*. Katie performs in the Blue Apple Core company and has been developing into more prominent roles. Katie says that she enjoys the social part of Blue Apple as it keeps her busy and she loves meeting new people. She also loves being in the shows and performing to large audiences. Her favourite role so far was playing a mysterious character in *Lashings of Ginger Beer* (January 2023). When she is not Blue Apple Katie attends Winchester Go LD and also loves baking cakes.



Vendula Kacetlová

Graduate of Theatre Theory and History, and Cultural Management at Masaryk University in Brno. She is currently pursuing her PhD studies at the Theatre Faculty of JAMU (Janáček Academy of Performing Arts), where she has been researching the work of European theatres that collaborate with actors with intellectual disabilities. Her point of reference is the experience gained from organisational, dramaturgical and technical cooperation with Aldente Theatre in Brno.



Photo: Jan Vrbka

Jitka Vrbková

In 2008 she founded Aldente Theatre and since then she has been working there as an artistic director, director, scriptwriter, a dance and acting lecturer and an actress. She has been and continues to be involved in these activities also outside Aldente Theatre. She studied theatre directing at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and dramaturgy at the Theatre Faculty of the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno. She later received her PhD in Dramatic Arts and also worked in Brno as a teacher and researcher. Her academic activity focuses on the field of "actor-specific theatre" (theatre made with actors with otherness), which she explores in her artistic research. Artistic and academic activities are thus complementary. She has four children, one of them with Down's syndrome.



Marie Měkotová, Lenka Galatíková, Barbora Suchopárková, Klára Kulhavá, Hana Kábrtová, Anna Marie Slobodová, Miroslava Schejbalová and Kristýna Kučerová (not in the picture)

were selected as a group of young people - researchers - for the Erasmus+ project called "Be IN!(clusive)" to observe and reflect on the work of three European inclusive theatres: "We are university students and our fields of study are diverse. Thanks to the "Be IN!(clusive)" project, we can combine disciplines such as philosophy, special education, psychology, physical theatre, translation and theatre studies. We like to find new ways to support people with difference, to expand the boundaries of thinking, and this was our goal throughout the project".



Photo: Mikołaj Starzyński

Aleksandra Skotarek

is a professional actress at Theatre 21 and has over a dozen acting roles under her belt. She currently plays in productions directed by Justyna Wielgus: *Libido romantico*, *Pokaż*, as well as in the solo performance *Nie jestem rośliną. Strumień świadomości* (*I Am Not a Plant. A Stream of Consciousness*). She loves Theatre 21 - she is a very good actress thanks to it and for it. She is interested in theatre and she reads a lot, mostly psychological and sociological books. She likes to play the piano. She is writing her own book. She listens to classical music, which has a calming effect on her. She likes to be herself, she is comfortable with herself and wants to share her world with others.



Photo: Klaudyna Schubert

Dominika Feiglewicz

Graduate of drama acting at the Stanisław Wyspiański Academy of Theatre Arts in Kraków, actress and accessibility coordinator at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Kraków, and founder and president of the Migawka Foundation in Kraków, which aims to facilitate participation of deaf and hearing impaired people in creating art. She is the winner of the Journalists' Toucan Award at the 41st Actors' Song Festival in Wrocław and the Special Award of the ZAiKS Authors' Association for the best performance of a Polish song at the 41st Actors' Song Festival in Wrocław. The Migawka Foundation was awarded the Stanisław Wyspiański Theatre Prize. In 2018 Dominika Feiglewicz won the Creative Scholarship of the City of Kraków. She initiated and run theatre workshops for deaf and hearing people at the Old Theatre in Kraków. She has run theatre workshops for deaf and hearing people and people with aphasia in Kraków and Katowice. In 2023 she started a collaboration with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.



Photo: Zuzanna Mazurek

Beata Szczucińska

Vice-Chancellor of the Aleksander Zelwerowicz Theatre Academy in Warsaw (and previously Administrative Director) since 2005. Much of her work has focused on transforming and adapting the organisational and legal structure of the Academy to the changing reality. As Vice-Chancellor, over the years, she has been actively involved in creating the statutes of the Academy. She has passed on her practical experience and skills in working in the non-governmental sector and international exchanges to students of Theatre Studies, helping them develop their competencies in project implementation and basic cultural management. At the same time, she has been raising funds for the International Theatre Schools Festival. She actively uses her competencies as a manager of investment or soft projects. She continues her mission in the international field, facilitating close cooperation between universities (e.g. she was elected President of E:UTSA – Europe: Union of Theatre Schools and Academies for the term 2021-2023 and for the term 2023-2025). Currently, the E:UTSA partner universities are actively engaged in joint research and artistic projects aimed at recognising and describing their own transformative processes, as well as creating activities that respond to present-day challenges (support for students and teachers from Ukraine and Hungary, and women artists in Iran, systemic identification of educational opportunities for people with disabilities, the implementation of safe education procedures in the area of working with intimacy in theatre).



Photo: Agnieszka Dudziak

Kinga Chudobińska-Zdunik

Director and theatre artist. She is a graduate of classical philology at the University of Warsaw and about to complete her studies in directing at the Aleksander Zelwerowicz Theatre Academy in Warsaw. As an assistant director, she has collaborated with Iwona Kempa and Jitka Stokalska; she has also acted – as a performer – in *Filoktekt ex machina* (directed by Agata Koszulinska) at Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw (the performance premiered at the New Epiphanies Festival in 2022). In 2023, the Collegium Nobilium Theatre hosted the premiere of her original production *Ból (Pain)* – her directorial debut and also her graduation play.



Photo: Patryk Kurowski

Filip Pawlak

Producer, performer and social debater, queer person with a hand disability. He graduated from of the Film School in Katowice and the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław, currently a student of the international programme in performing arts at the Malmo Theatre Academy. Former head of production at Nowy Teatr in Warsaw, he has been working as a producer since 2019. He was also a production manager of the 10Treffen series as part of the 60th Theaterreffen in Berlin (2023). As an ambassador of the European programme Europe Beyond Access from 2019-2021 he has been co-curating the Learning Journeys project as part of the EBA since 2021. He has been a member of the IETM International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts within the Global Connectors programme since 2021 and a member of its Advisory Committee since 2023. Filip Pawlak performed in Rafał Urbacik's *Gatunki chronione* (*Protected Species*) (Rozbark Dance and Movement Theatre in Bytom) and *Niech nigdy w tym dniu słońce nie świeci* (*Let the Sun Never Shine on This Day*) (Aleksander Fredro Theatre in Gniezno).



Dagmara Gumkowska

Selector, theatre promoter, curator, cultural manager. and an international relations and management officer at the Stanisław Wyspiański Silesian Theatre in Katowice. She is also a programme curator of the OPEN THE DOOR International Festival. For many years (until 2016), she was the artistic director of the TEATROMANIA International Festival, the head of the management department and a lead specialist for the implementation of cultural projects at the Bytom Cultural Centre. Author and coordinator of the HartOFFanie Teatrem project - a series of performances by independent theatre, made in 2003-2016. She was the author and curator of the Sztuka/Poznanie/Działanie (Art/Cognition/Action) project financed by the EEA (the EEA Grants) and implemented in 2014-2016 and a member of the Artistic Council of the Small Theatre Forms Festival KONTRAPUNKT in Szczecin (2018-2022 editions).



Photo: Karol Grygoruk

Anna Rochowska

Theatre pedagogue and head of the Department of Theatre Pedagogy at the Zbigniew Raszeński Theatre Institute in Warsaw. For 26 years she has been affiliated with TR Warszawa, where she was the head of the Education Team and initiated a number of projects in theatre pedagogy and promoted accessibility of culture. She created the TR BEZ BARIER (TR WITHOUT BARRIERS) programme, for which TR Warszawa was awarded the Grand Prix - Leader of Accessible Events in Warsaw in 2022. Anna Rochowska is a member of the Theatre Pedagogues' Association, and a graduate of the Faculty of Theatre Studies at the Theatre Academy in Warsaw, Postgraduate Studies for Managers of Culture at the Faculty of Management (University of Warsaw). She is also a doctoral student at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IS PAN) and a lecturer at the Department of Theatre Studies at the Theatre Academy in Warsaw. In 2021 she won the Halina Machulska Award 2021. On 1 September 2023 she will assume the position of the director of TR Warszawa.



Photo: Jakub Szafrański

Igor Stokfiszewski

Cultural researcher, curator, activist. He has collaborated with, e.g., the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards and the Rimini Protokoll company. He was a member of the organizing team of the 7th Berlin Biennale of Contemporary Art (2012) curated by Artur Żmijewski. He collaborates on an ongoing basis with artist Jasmina Wójcik, with whom he has co-created activities implemented with the community of the Ursus district of Warsaw, including the creative documentary *Symfonia Fabryki Ursus* (*Symphony of the Ursus Factory*) (2018), and activities involving children's participation. He also regularly cooperates with the Strefa Wolnościowa Foundation. He is the author of the books: *Zwrot polityczny* (*The Political Turn*) (2009) and *Prawo do kultury* (*The Right to Culture*) (2018), a co-editor, of, e.g., the volumes *Sztuka ze społecznością* (*Art with Community*) (2018), *Kultura i rozwój. Analizy, rekomendacje, studia przypadków* (*Culture and Development. Analyses, Recommendations, Case Studies*) (2016) and *Jerzy Grotowski. Teksty zebrane* (*Jerzy Grotowski. Collected Texts*) (2012). Since 2006 he has been a member of Krytyka Polityczna where he coordinates the programme of the JASNA 10 Social Institution of Political Criticism in Warsaw.



Photo: Jakub Szafrański

Anna Żórawska

President of the Culture without Barriers Foundation. In her daily activities, she shows what diversity, inclusion and accessibility mean in practice. She is passionate about making multimedia, venues and events accessible to people with different needs - mainly people with visual impairments, the Deaf, the hearing impaired and people on the autism spectrum. She is a coach in the field of information and communication accessibility and event accessibility, the author of audio descriptions of films and performances and a co-author of documents on accessibility for the Capital City of Warsaw, including the *Guidelines for Accessible Events* for the Capital City of Warsaw, and the *Guidelines for Ensuring Information and Communication Accessibility* for the Warsaw City Hall. Anna Żórawska started the Network of Leaders of Accessibility and the project "Tu możesz" ("Here You Can") whose aim is to create digital knowledge base for hearing impaired persons and she is the producer of the Culture without Barriers Festival. She sits on the Accessibility Council of the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy. She is also a graduate of the Polish-American Freedom Foundation's School for Leaders and a mentor at the Network of Entrepreneurial Women.



Photo: Jakub Szafrański

Robert Więckowski

Visually impaired person, journalist, editor of the kulturabezbarier.org portal, researcher of Polish literature and the use of intersemiotic translation in making culture accessible to visually impaired people. Since 2009, he has been working as a consultant of audio descriptions of films, theatre performances and museum exhibitions. He is a co-author of *Principles of Creating Audio Descriptions of Audiovisual Artworks*) and author of the *Principles of Creating Audiodescription to Visual Artworks* of the Culture without Barriers Foundation. Since 2011, he has been running training courses on audio description and services for visually impaired people. Robert Więckowski has been researching audio description and ways of making cultural texts accessible to people with sensory disabilities. He is a member of the Polish Association of Cultural Studies.



Photo: Petr Francán

Šimon Peták

born in 1990 in the south of the Czech Republic. He graduated in theatre dramaturgy from JAMU (The Janáček Academy of Performing Arts) in Brno. He is currently a student of several courses at the Theatre Faculty in Brno, and in the academic year 2022/23 he ran a theatre studio for foreign exchange students Theatre Without Borders. In 2018, he started his doctoral studies. His research focuses on different models of teaching theatre dramaturgy at universities in Europe. In addition, he works as a freelance theatre playwright and scriptwriter (he has worked at the City Theatre in Zlín, the Slovácké Divadlo theatre in Uherské Hradiště, the Divadlo Polárka theatre in Brno, the Divadlo Tramtárie theatre in Olomouc, the Spolek Masopust association in Prague and the Divadlo Andrej Bagar theatre in Nitra, Slovakia). He has a family, writes poetry and practices Zen Buddhism.

About the project

The “Be IN!(clusive)” project involves three European theatre ensembles who professionally create performances with the participation of actors with disabilities (primarily intellectual disabilities). They also complement their theatrical activities with other educational and social activities. These theatres are: Blue Apple Theatre (Winchester, the UK), Divaldo Aldente (Brno, the Czech Republic) and Theatre 21 (Warsaw, Poland).

The aim of the project was to organise experience-sharing meetings and performance presentations in the partner theatres’ countries. The events included workshops for theatre groups, performance stagings, meetings with audiences, a symposium and an exhibition. The activities were also complemented by a research-based reflection, for which the Czech organisation Rytmus was responsible. A team of young researchers – together with a psychologist and a creativity educator – observed the activities of theatre ensembles and audience reactions.

The aim of the “Be IN!” project is to break stereotypes through theatre and theatre-related activities, to show new perspectives, to foster critical thinking and to create conditions for self-discovery and self-development, ultimately changing society as a whole.

The project is co-financed by the European Union’s Erasmus Plus programme.

More information about the project can be found at:

<https://beintheatres.com/>

[Information on organisations involved in the project](#)

Blue Apple Theatre

Blue Apple Theatre was founded by Jane Jessop and her son Tommy Jessop, a young man with Down’s syndrome who wanted to perform, but there was no suitable group in his area to do so. So together they organised a theatre workshop to see if anyone was interested. Fifty people took part, and some of them still perform in Blue Apple today.

Currently, the ensemble works with around fifty people with various disabilities. Some join it for social reasons, for fun and creative enjoyment, while others want to be treated as professional artists. Throughout the year, the main ensemble stages a large production in summer and winter. The ensemble strives to ensure that (despite the obvious challenges) every member of the cast has the chance to perform at their highest level. Blue Apple

also performs at Heritage Open Days, regularly collaborates with Play to the Crowd (Theatre Royal Winchester and Hat Fair), the University of Winchester, in particular D@Win Dance, local Winchester Go LD charity for people with intellectual disabilities and works with other organisations (for example the Philharmonia).

www.blueappletheatre.com

Divadlo Aldente

A theatre ensemble that brings together young actors and authors with Down's syndrome and professional theatre artists without disabilities. The theatre was founded in 2008 and the actors with Down's syndrome first performed in an Aldente Theatre production in 2014, which marked the beginning of a new phase in the company's artistic journey. Since then, Theatre Aldente has been striving to create a new theatrical poetics, which is based on the specific skills of actors with Down's syndrome and the dialogue between them and professional actors without disabilities. We believe that people with Down's syndrome have a unique vision of the world and exceptional stage skills.

The theatre does not have a permanent stage. In Brno, it plays at the Barka theatre and the Leitnerova club. It currently has eight shows in its repertoire and plays around 30 performances a year. The ensemble takes part in festivals. It creates workshops for schools to accompany performances and help students comprehend the elements of stage performance and meet diverse artists. Aldente Theatre collaborates with the Theatre Faculty of the Leoš Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno on research projects on artistic and creative exploration. It strives to become a fully professional stage in terms of production and artistic work, and is inspired by similar ensembles from abroad.

www.divadloaldente.cz

Teatr 21

Theatre 21 is a theatre ensemble whose actors are mainly people with Down's syndrome and autism. Over the 18 years of its activity, it has created more than a dozen performances presented in theatres and other cultural institutions in Poland. The ensemble has performed at national (Wrocław, Poznań, Gdańsk, Kraków) and international festivals (Prague, Berlin, Helsinki, Freiburg). In 2021, Theatre 21 was awarded with the "Polityka" Passport in the Theatre category. In addition to its artistic activities, Theatre 21 is

involved in education, theatre pedagogy and publishing; it organises conferences, lectures and is active in international networks.

In November 2022, the Theatre 21 Foundation opened the Centre of Inclusive Art, which is the first social and cultural institution in Warsaw dedicated to the work of artists with disabilities. Its main task is to include various social groups in the field of art, culture and research. Among other things, the Centre hosts premieres and theatre performances, concerts, meetings with artists, workshops, lectures on disability studies, exhibitions of visual artists and much more. The space and all events are adapted to the needs of people with various disabilities. The Centre of Inclusive Art is the first permanent home of Theatre 21, which had been operating without a permanent location for 17 years. The programme of the Centre of Inclusive Art is co-financed by the City of Warsaw.

www.teatr21.pl

Rytmus

A non-governmental organisation that, since 1994, has supported people with disabilities (especially intellectual disabilities) and their active inclusion in life, at school, at work, at home and in their leisure time. It uses the existing sources of support in society. It focuses on an individual approach and supports people in exercising their rights. It does this by providing social services and organising themed events.

