

FRATZ Reflections

Another World

Theater o.N. |





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- **Große Sprünge. Künstlerische Begegnungen im Theater mit den Jüngsten** (2014; in German)
- **FRATZ Reflections. The young child as counterpart** (2015; in German and English)
- **FRATZ Reflections. Music theater for the very young** (2017; in German and English)



Contents

Doreen Markert

Another World

Mindmap on the symposium topic

4

Christine Matschke

Opening spaces for future audiences

Works by contemporary dance and performance artists
at the FRATZ International Festival 2019 – An approach

5

Christine Matschke

Young audience growing wild

10

Angela Schubot, Jared Gradinger

Notes from the research for “YEW”

12

Shelley Etkin

Thoughts on “Nesting”

resonance is relationship

14

Alicja Morawska-Rubczak

Breath and beat

On “KUUKI” and “Future Beats”: Two interactive
performances for the very young

23

Madeleine Fahl

“Future Beats” – An interplay for the senses

27

Marie Yan

“Did you think of the children?”

A conversation we started

Including an essay by Karina Griffith:

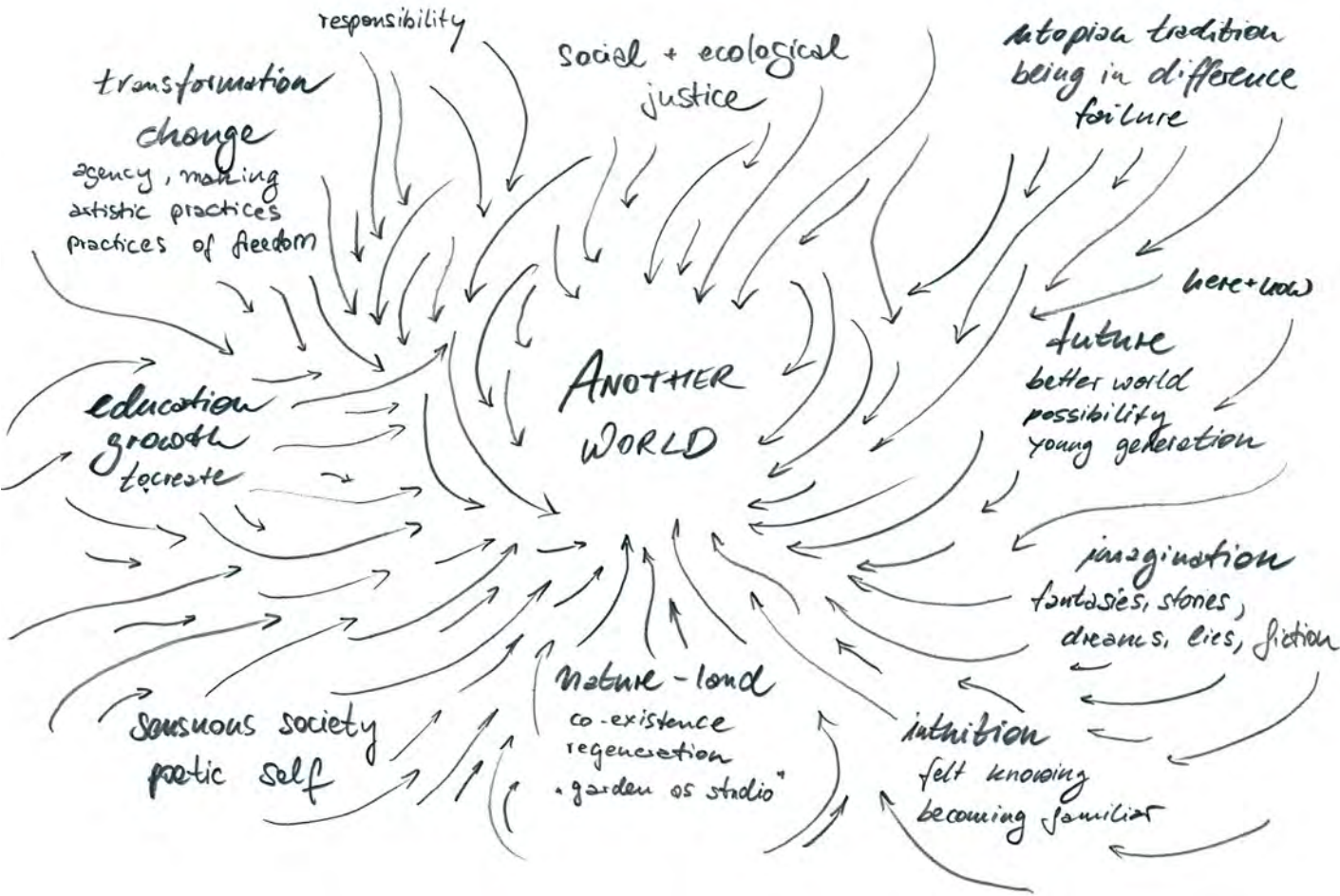
For those children in the lonely place

30

Authors

36

The drawing on the left (for “Future Beats”) as well as other chalk drawings in the lyrics by Shelley Etkin (to “Nesting”) and the text by Madeleine Fahl (for “Future Beats”) have been created by the artist Katelyn Stiles. She draws live in performance situations, the pictures are created within a few minutes. Afterwards the spectators were invited to look at the drawings.



Opening spaces for future audiences

Works by contemporary dance and performance artists at the FRATZ International Festival 2019 – An approach

Christine Matschke

In 1982, Michael Ende, author of books for children and youth, invited the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) politician Erhard Eppler to his home in the Alban Hills near Rome. Eppler, also an author, was active in environmental and peace policy. Together with actress, director and artistic director Hanne Tächl,¹ they freely discussed capitalism, gender issues and the dangers of growth policies, “far removed from everyday political events.” In the course of their talk, Ende describes his participation at a conference of the Swiss Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute in 1979.²

The occasion to call 200 international top managers to a meeting entitled “The Rationalization Trap” was a technical advance: microprocessors would now enable machines to replace humans in work operations. Michael Ende’s task at the conference was to ask the executives crucial questions and read them a passage from his novel *Momo*.

Ende did just that: He read aloud from his book to the managers and offered them a simple, yet extraordinary proposal: “I notice that, in our century, hardly any positive utopias are being written anymore. The last mostly positively imagined utopias come from the last century. Think of Jules Verne [...] or Karl Marx [...]. But looking at the utopias that have been written in our century, from Wells’ *Time Machine* to Huxley’s *Brave New World* to Orwell’s *1984*, we only find nightmares. The person of our century is afraid of his own future [...] It is conceived of only in factual constraints. And constraints make us afraid. The sense of helplessness is so great that we don’t even dare to consider what we actually would wish for...” This term alone might have produced skeptical frowns among the conference members. Michael Ende then suggested that they imagine themselves one hundred years into the future and express how they wished “that the world would appear then.”³ The managers refused to take part in this “nonsense” and the event was broken off after half an hour.

In 2019, Ende – ignored as a children’s author and attacked as an escapist⁴ – would have turned 90. The world today faces the effects of capitalist growth policy more directly than ever, as shown beyond all doubt by the “Fridays for Future” protests started by the youth movement. In times “when certainties erode, future concepts stem more often from technology than from sociology and philosophy, and backward-looking ideologies spawn hopes of salvation,”⁵ the arts, in particular, are seeking alterna-

tives. This quest was also the clear focus this year at the fourth installment of FRATZ International, the interdisciplinary festival for the very youngest audiences, hosted by Theater o.N. The discourse focused on the role of theater, sensory-aesthetic perceptions of the world and the search for new “alliances and paths – to understand, to create, to change.”⁶



The search for alternative realities

Theater o.N. has been offering space for yearnings and hopes for forty years. Since its foundation in 1979, the theater, then called Zinnober, has viewed itself as a sort of dream laboratory. The nine-member collective of actors and puppeteers, nearly all graduates of East Berlin’s “Ernst Busch” theater conservatory, was long the only independent theater in the GDR. In that niche, functioning as a participatory democracy, the collective searched for a connection between work and life. It created a kind of “fantastic realism” with its 1985 play “traumhaft” (“dreamy”), which was literally “haunted by dead and still undiscovered yearnings.”⁷ Personal and autobiographical themes with potentially universal relevance remain a constant inspirational fuel for the Theater o.N. ensemble, also in its youth theater projects.

The theater apparently shares a connection to Berlin's independent contemporary dance scene as well, in the resistant desire to create alternative social norms and values, the belief in collective forms of shared work and life and the revived interest in the inner worlds and powers of human beings. Accordingly, artists from the contemporary dance scene were present at FRATZ for the first time in 2019. At selected outdoor locations in public urban space, they created sensory retreats that temporarily suspended a linear and goal-oriented sense of time. For example, in Pankow Botanical Park, Angela Schubot and Jared Gradinger invited children aged three and up into an intensive, interactive encounter with plant nature. With "Nesting", Shelley Etkin and Yoav Admoni opened a dream space of noises and sounds in the ruined Franciscan monastery church in Berlin's Mitte district. And with the fake lecture "Tipping Utopia", Stephanie Maher, co-founder of Ponderosa e.V., brought her realized utopia of cooperative social and artistic living in the rural East German Uckermark to vibrant life within the sober conference room of the Podewil building.



"YEW:kids": On the (in-)visible and the (in-)credible. Or: To be in the world with the whole body

"Plants have no eyes. So for our work, we wanted to find a physical condition in which there is no front. That's why we sit back-to-back so often, to create the 360-degree angle that plants have," said Angela Schubot in an email interview with the author. During their symbiotic duet in "YEW:kids", Angela Schubot and Lea Kieffer⁸ closed their eyes, or held an absent gaze: "I would rather say that the eyes are implicit in the rest of the body and try to pull everything inwards," explains Jared Gradinger. The blindness that comes along with turning one's sight to the inside is only a presumption. In Angela Schubot and Jared Gradinger's philosophi-



cal approach to dance, sensory perception no longer depends on visual observation of the environment, but rather opens the body to the world as an organ facing in all directions. Depriving the sense of sight of its dominance also challenges a conventional definition of reality: In our scientifically oriented, logical, rational (western) culture, visible facts are regarded as the most real and credible.

To become like plants, as these two artists do, is not only a posthuman act for equal rights of all forms of life. It also rejects of a school of thought that has shaped our relationship to nature for centuries: the dualism of Descartes. The resulting division between mind and body, or between thought and matter, has literally left our understanding of nature empty.⁹ Jared Gradinger's artistic approach, inspired by the spiritual naturalist Machaëlle Small Wright and others, can be read as an antithesis to Descartes: "Everything we perceive is part of nature. And we are not separate from it. Nature is the organization of form. Our quest to define things and our insane ability to objectify everything increases our separation from the world. Once we are aware of this, it's about finding out about the best way to meet the world around us. And to meet the nature in us. It is just about finding out what resonates within you." Gradinger thus advocates a vitally creative relationship between humans and nature, conceived of more as a flat, net-like, eco-systemic and co-creative exchange structure rather than as a goal-oriented, exploitative hierarchal pyramid, with humans, the crowning glory of creation, standing on its peak.

Separating humanity from nature rejects a qualitative concept of perceiving the world: "When I see a tree, I do not first perceive something quantifiable. Rather, I perceive the quality, the essence of tree, the green, the liveliness and all its characteristic features. These are all qualities that I cannot measure, weigh or count, but that I have to experience at first. And to do that, of course I also first have to learn how, to practice and become educated. The Greeks and other cultures knew this and their pedagogy had this

goal.”¹⁰ Even though Schubot & Gradinger certainly do not aim to educate through their work, there is a certain common ground here.

In digital times, in which the visual dominates our perception and other senses become increasingly impoverished, it seems more crucial than ever to expose children to “real” experiences where they can sense the world with their whole bodies. Not in order to learn a skill, but to maintain a “childlike” ability to detect resonances and enter directly into contact, as the young audience did during “YEW:kids”.¹¹ Then pedagogy might be no longer a process of educating, but a practice of mutual learning, of humans from nature and of adults from children (within a dramaturgically framed, dynamic field).



The “wild”¹² behavior of the young audience during “YEW:kids” seems much closer to Schubot’s and Gradinger’s understanding of theater than that of the adults’, socialized as a theater audience. Even a fully-grown body is still a resonating body. Yet, adults have often forgotten how to follow their intuitive and spontaneous impulses, their own inner physical reality. Angela Schubot conveyed how this could work during a workshop on biorhythm at the FRATZ Symposium. Here, the participants could try to feel a biorhythm inherent in the body (and the world) through a simple exercise that keeps a body moving beyond all voluntary actions and connects it to the world from within. Starting with an image of physically melting into the earth, the seated participants sank gradually from the head downwards into a slump, then rose to sitting upright again just by following a natural inner impulse.

I would like to state here that “YEW:kids”, inspired by somatic practice, calls not only for new performance aesthetics that place “inner intensities”¹³ in a dynamic, performative force field,¹⁴ but also for a new understanding of the spectator. Often, parents and educators attending contemporary dance performances with

children are concerned about whether they should expect the kids to “handle that.” But with another understanding of attendance as active, fully physical involvement and participation in a larger system, the question of what one may or may not show children would be a different one.

“Nesting”: A permeable shelter for the imagination

The FRATZ Atelier, a three-day experimental room called “Nesting”, for children aged three and up, also took place outdoors. The sculptor, dancer and performer Yoav Admoni built a walk-in wooden sculpture in the rear section of the Franciscan monastery ruins in Berlin’s Mitte district. The round, scaffold-like gathering space with an open top is reminiscent of a yurt, or of a spaceship capsule. Neon-colored nets made by textile designer Layla Klinger are stretched between struts. They replace the walls of the sculptural building, turning it into a permeable space of transformation that takes in the surrounding urban landscape with its prevalent conditions of light, temperature and noise.



The concept of this permeable shelter is the work of the interdisciplinary artist¹⁵ Shelley Etkin. Like her colleague Jared Gradinger, she follows nature closely in her approach, working at Gut Stolzenhagen (Ponderosa e.V.) in Uckermark, Brandenburg and other locations. “Nesting” relates to a term already framed within Etkin’s work: With “landing,” she refers to processes of arriving in the body and at a place, as opposed to the term “land” as a limited territory. In “landing sessions,” the artist explores with participants aspects such as colonialism and migration, healing, emotional knowledge and communication through body and movement. The method of imaginative journeys informs her work. “Nesting”, developed in collaboration with the actress Iduna Hegen of Theater o.N., was inspired by this research.¹⁶



“Nesting” proved to be a place of temporary arrival and retreat (from the big-city tumult) while attending the festival. As when entering a yurt, the young visitors were invited to remove their shoes as they stepped into the sculpture. Leaning against the net-like walls in a seated circle, wrapped in wool blankets, they partook in an intimate ceremony of sound. A perception of the setting as partly staged, partly drawn from the surroundings pushed the sense of sight to the background here, too. Kneeling, sometimes with closed eyes as if meditating, the performers Shelley Etkin and Iduna Hegen made sounds from a pre-linguistic (children’s) world to tell fairy tales, spanning a dramatic arc of tension with corresponding intonations. Some animal-like noises also emerged during their collective-individual fantasy journey. The vocal performance led to a more conscious perception of the sounds of the nearby cityscape and a kind of noise-filtering process: ambulance sirens in the distance, birdsong just behind the ruined walls. Then another snarl, a growl, a croak from the performers. The term “landing” gradually took shape as a concept of self-orientation that found its expression in a personal sense of physical, sensual, resonant integration with the world, in the “interplay between external perceptions and internal experiences.”¹⁷ Another scene with a singing bowl gave both children and adults a special experience: Iduna Hegen slowly made the bowl full of water re-sound. Vibrations that would otherwise have been solely audible could be seen in the bubbling water. Those who wished could also step into the (empty) singing bowl themselves and test the vibration resonance with their bodies.

“Tipping Utopia”: Anarchy in Brandenburg. Or: An experiment in living out dreams

Suddenly she’s standing in the doorway. Cowboy hat, backpack, long skirt, boots: Stephanie Maher looks as if she’s just finished a

long journey, maybe by hitchhiking. Or on foot? We could easily believe it of this jaunty choreographer and improvisation artist from the USA.

Maher, who has lived and worked in Berlin since 1998, is a co-founder of the rural headquarters of the international dance scene of Berlin, Ponderosa e. V. in Stolzenhagen, Uckermark. She started the non-profit association on the estate of a former farm cooperative at the end of the 1990s, along with her husband Uli Kaiser, who co-occupied the K77 dance studio squat in Berlin’s Kastanienallee, and a few freaks from the post-hippie scene of San Francisco, all now established choreographers. Every summer, around a hundred dancers and people interested in movement meet here near the Oder to work, relax and do research.¹⁸





Ponderosa stands (in the author's personal memory) for freedom, chaos, creativity and community building. Or, more officially, "for the attempt to develop an alternative micro-society [...] in rural areas, in which artistic creation goes hand in hand with a sustainable way of life."¹⁹ With her three-year art project "Tipping Utopia", which starts in 2019, Maher wants to sound out "the potential of performative practice" at Ponderosa "based on moments of tipping and failure."²⁰

Her eponymous Fake Lecture, for which she now stands, looking (pretending to be?) somewhat uncertain and aimless in the sober conference hall of Podewil, is an autobiographically-inspired performative talk as part of the FRATZ Symposium "Another World".

It quickly becomes clear that the boundaries between reality and fiction are fluid here. Maher's artistic approach could be understood thus: To live might always mean to live one's dreams as well. However, she seems to have been attracted foremost to chaos as a creative force. After introducing herself and unpacking various objects from her backpack, she sings her favorite song to the symposium guests – the song, played on vinyl, accompanies a small tea ceremony every morning at her home. She then gives us, the temporary community, an insight into her own personal, self-taught Kundalini yoga practice. Everyone can participate, raising their arms and breathing vigorously in and out one hundred times. After this warm-up, she invites us to take part in a transformation process as simple as it is ingenious: Over the course of two minutes, everyone can make a change within the room.

In a heartbeat, that Ponderosa feeling is back again, tumbling you – for better or for worse – right out of your tidy everyday Berlin life. We're no longer just sitting on chairs, but on the floor too. Books, clothes and photos are strewn everywhere and in addition to Steph Maher, other old and new Ponderosa artists are getting involved in the conversation. A collective gathering of personal and shared experiences gets underway: "Ponderosa was a great

challenge for me," reflects Theater o.N. actress Iduna Hegen, who was in Stolzenhagen to prepare for "Nesting". "If I hadn't had a task, I would have been totally lost." Shelley Etkin describes a few children playing with bulky rubbish who kept saying, "I'm an artist." Another woman adds: "When I come back to my one-on-one relationship in Berlin, it always feels suddenly very strange, almost lonely."

At the end of the lecture, Ponderosa appears to be a giant puzzle whose pieces are constantly being reassembled. As Stephanie Maher points out during the performance, Ponderosa is also changing. Not only because it currently lacks active young artists to take over the rooms as living and working spaces on the estate and its extension, the nearby art space "Betonnest" (Concrete Nest), but also because, this year, it has started offering events for youth and young adults from the surrounding region. Of course this will not halt the increasing polarization of society. But at least some options to resist it do exist: Alternatives like art, solidarity and social and ecological responsibility.

- 1 Hanne Tächl, who died last year, was artistic director of the "kommunalen kontakt-theater", now "Kulturkabinett" in Cannstatt from 1976 to 2007. She is regarded as a pioneer in the field of autobiographical theater work with laypersons. <https://www.stuttgarter-nachrichten.de/inhalt.die-ehemalige-kkt-intendantin-hanne-taechl-ist-tot-theaterfrau-mit-courage.8cbo30bf-d27a-468d-b92d-ff837e404706.html> (in German)
- 2 The Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute, a research institute, is the oldest think tank in Switzerland. It was founded in 1963 by Gottlieb Duttweiler, who also started one of the largest Swiss retail companies, the Migros Cooperative.
- 3 The conversation between Michael Ende, Hanne Tächl and Erhard Eppler appeared in 1982 under the title "Phantasie/Kultur/Politik: Protokoll eines Gesprächs", Edition Weitbrecht in Stuttgart. Ibid., p. 20f.
- 4 Barbara Möller: "Komm, wir stehlen uns die Zeit". In: "Die Welt", 23 February 2016. https://www.welt.de/print/die_welt/kultur/article152535887/Komm-wir-stehlen-uns-die-Zeit.html
- 5 Hubert Winkels, Head of DLF Literature Editorial Department: "The Frankfurt Book Fair 2019". In: Deutschlandfunk Program Guide, October 2019, p. 3
- 6 Program booklet FRATZ International 2019
- 7 Gunnar Decker: "Der Tautropfen der Welt". In: Theater der Zeit, November 2015. Christine Matschke: "Poetische Widerständler". In: Die Deutsche Bühne, December 2016
- 8 Representing Jared Gradingier
- 9 Ende/Tächl/Eppler, p. 32
- 10 Ibid., p. 33
- 11 See Christine Matschke: "Wildwüchsiges Kleinstpublikum", published on tanzschreiber.de, May 2019
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 See Astrid Kaminski: "Innere Intensitäten". In: tanzraumberlin, January/February 2019
- 14 See Sabine Huschka and Barbara Gronau: Energy and Forces as Aesthetic Interventions. Politics of Bodily Scenarios. transcript Verlag, 2019
- 15 She works in the field between dance, performance, ecology, queer feminism, curation, pedagogy and community organization. www.shelleyetkin.com
- 16 Program booklet FRATZ International 2019
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Astrid Kaminski: "Eine Spur Post-Hippie-Szene". In: taz, die tageszeitung, 16 August 2017
- 19 Program booklet FRATZ International 2019
- 20 Ibid.

Young audience growing wild

Christine Matschke

In “YEW:kids”, the children’s version of “YEW:outside” shown at this year’s FRATZ International festival for very young theater audiences, a post-humanist approach by duo Schubot & Gradinger meets with direct physical resonance.



“What are they doing?” asks Nele, sitting by a hole in the ground next to me. I say: “I don’t know. What do you think?” Silence. The little girl, whom I had just gotten to know ten minutes earlier over a musical sorrel leaf, gets up and goes to the other kindergarten children. They are buzzing curiously around Angela Schubot and Lea Kieffer. The two dancers are deep within a symbiotic duet and seem unaware of the young visitors.

“YEW:kids” is a nature-oriented outdoor performance by Angela Schubot and Jared Gradinger for people aged three and up, produced by Theater o.N., which hosted the FRATZ International interdisciplinary theater festival for the fourth time this year. With the theme “Another World”, the current festival represented artists from Berlin’s contemporary dance scene as a welcome new inclusion. They used and created oases in public urban spaces; in the prosaic conference room at Podewil, they evoked their own social utopia, an actualized project in Berlin’s surrounding region. Schubot & Gradinger’s children’s version of “YEW:outside”, performed in the Blankenfelde-Pankow Botanical People’s Park, proved to be a special experience, widened in unexpected ways by the very young audience.

In the sunshine between beehives and an avenue of fruit trees, Angela Schubot prepares the children for an encounter with living beings that have neither eyes nor a front, like a tree. And for invisible encounters, such as via body heat. The forty-minute performance walk takes the group, including a few big kids in the field as well (performing arts for children and youth, puppetry, education and dance journalism), through meadows, fields and a strip of bordering forest. Angela Schubot (choreography and performance), Stefan Rusconi (sound) and Lea Kieffer (performance, standing in for Jared Gradinger) sensually prepare the participants for the extreme body-as-nature, boundary-dissolving movement language of Schubot & Gradinger.

As if on a walk to study medicinal herbs, we taste sorrel leaves and learn that plants, too, have languages and interactions with their environment. Through an app, the sorrel’s organic impulses representing the entire flora (“mugwort, nettle, beech, ...”) are transformed into harp and drum sounds. In a circle ceremony we call on the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms with small, angular, twisting and fluttering hand gestures and “plant” ourselves with hands or feet into little holes in the ground. In short, we do things that give us physical, sensual, intuitive access to the world. Moments arise that rattle our rationally-based social values, our established concept of the world that still allows us to maintain our (supposed) supremacy in the hierarchy of living beings.¹



Angela Schubot and Lea Kieffer sit in the meadow back-to-back, their arms and legs folded like embryos. Their pulsing motions, the contracting and opening of their limbs and bodies and their unselfconscious, absent gazes merge them into one strange creature. The children's reactions range from confused to fascinated: "That's impossible," the biggest boy in the group repeats over and over, and approaches the physical enigma as if driven to do something about it. He tickles Schubot and Kieffer on the



feet. No reaction. Another child says: "Now the humans have turned into plants." The cluster abruptly dissolves and the children explore the nearby surroundings in small groups, in peaceful co-existence with the dancers' duet. As the dynamics of the choreography swell, they swarm back to Schubot and Kieffer. The little crowd follows along beside the moving body sculpture with loud squeals, responding instantly to every change of movement and direction.

Later, on a meditative silent walk, connected to each other by a hand-held rope, the children discover mysterious sounds and the sight of two naked bodies from behind, standing as if buried headfirst on the side of the path. Between fallen trees and branches woven into a tent, they are invited to make sounds to accompany Schubot and Kieffer's movements at the performance's end. Some children sound aggressive, as if they wanted to interfere, some simply accompany without intention. One girl howls fervently, like a little wolf. After their ecstatic choreographic climax, as the two dancers sit back-to-back and abruptly lift their heads towards the sky, a child says: "I just saw you there in the forest, with your head in the ground." Angela Schubot answers: "Nah, that can't be. I was just flying. Up there."



- 1 "The Nature of Us," the final piece in Schubot & Grading's posthuman trilogy, breaks with the previous performances. The harmonious, connecting atmosphere is replaced by a seemingly dystopian scenario, at the end of which a group of spectators are symbolically placed under the performers' protection. Presumably, the plant world would have better chances of survival after an environmental disaster than humans would...



Angela's notes

Sitting by the Artemisia/Beifuss:

the whisper-wind-tide, my hair melts into the leaves. ... she makes me sing ... but sing as a human ... not sing "her," not sing "for her," but sing with her. as a human, joining the wind. every plant is different in that way ... i start to understand that. some like to be sang to. some transform me and open places in me i never felt, as if they sing through me, sound through me. some want to sing together. (maybe this is also always changing ... always different?)

Sitting with the Beech:

... her mightiness scares me ... am i too trustful? we can't communicate. yet.

"i will be there" it says. and "i am losing you, i keep on losing you."

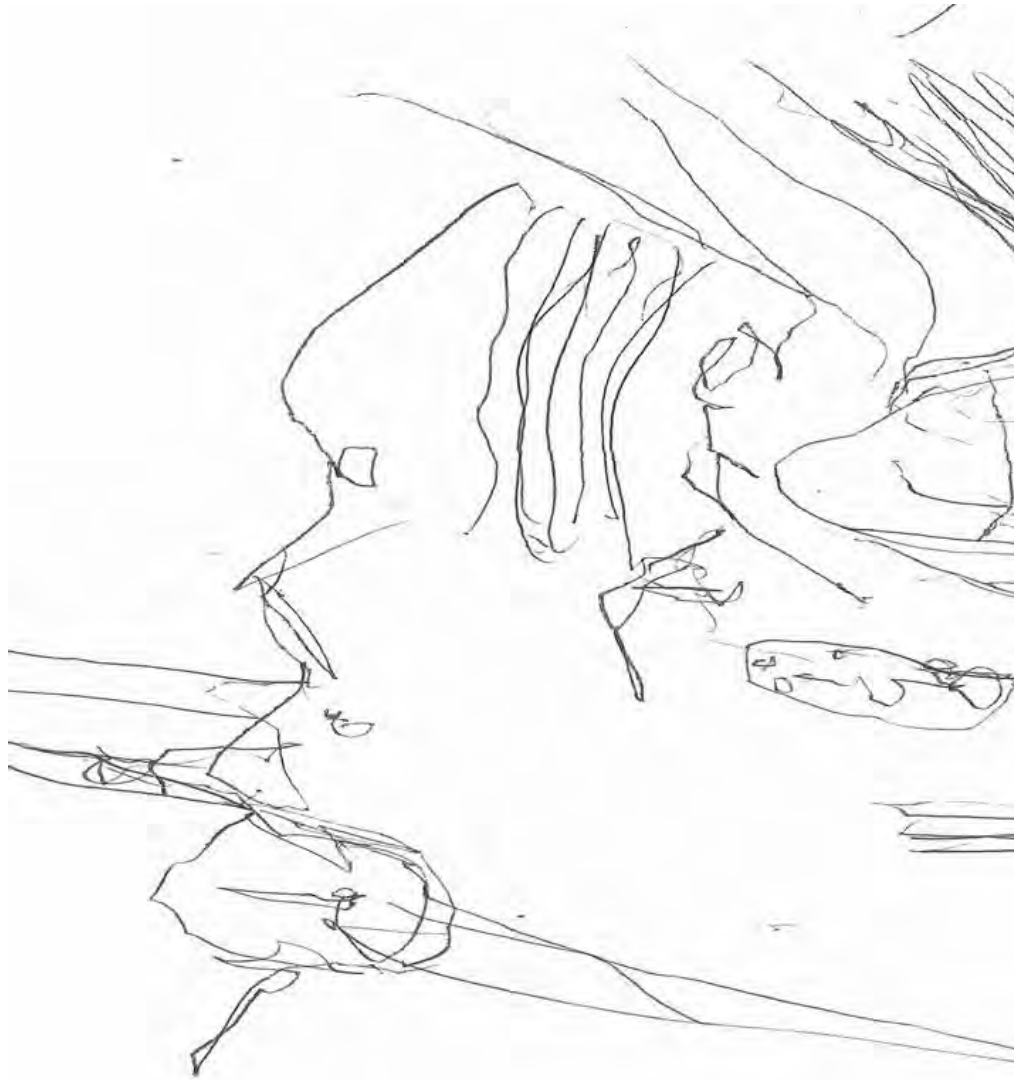
and feeling how she can "talk," be with more people at once of course. like she has mouths and ears everywhere and in so many different times ... that it can be with so many things and beings at the same time, and talk to them. ... something non-human and being so welcomed in it, floors me.

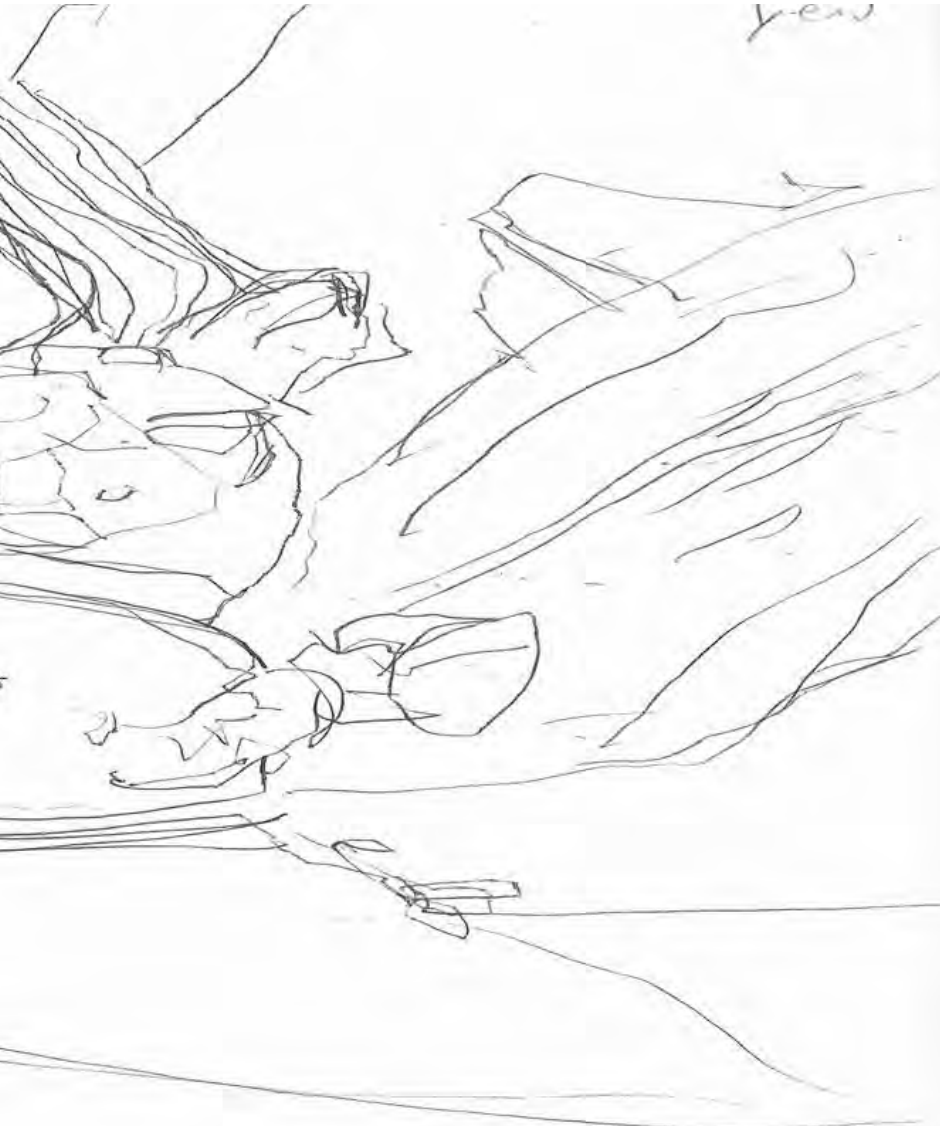
Sitting with the Yew:

it's working you from up till down. ... cosmos rather than earthy. it pierces the sky. in a high note. it feels uncomfortable, merciless, equal, does not give away her love to individuals ...

Sitting with one another/the Jaredplant:

we used to sit with plants/trees, doing "nothing," just "receiving," we did that today with one another ... like the other is the plant we are sitting with. one at a time. it was so insane and beautiful, unsnareable, unclassifiable ... even hard to remember ... on a really strange plane of reality ... trying to feel the other ... trying to be there for the other, with that same "tuning" you are with plants.





Jared's notes

LOOP OF RECIPROCITY

we will be the dreaming plant in the middle of dark winter where the plants are awake we dream for them.

yew. 7 bodies + 11 minus absence of 11. could see the ground moving waves of feeling paganism says there is another world but it is still this one. can we try? we can grow so many hearts/leaves

is that actually where your heart is? do you have more than one heart? heart in every cell? sadness comes from you to me, amplifying mine. i need you here. the seed. the potential of fire. of flame. of reincarnation. the shit/burnt seed from the ashes. i sleep with you i die with you. so much softness and movement. not a tree nor a plant. but an angela. an angela plant. like a song singing a song. i hear digestion in your spine. otherness offers you yourself. violence as a cleanse as a cure. violence as reality to create space. destruction can be joy. sadness comes from you to me. amplifying mine. it is only an offer.

oak in cool november tuesday with full warm sun shining through the last leaves ground covered with the summer work to feed the earth for winter. roots like crocodile floating on the lake – feel my heart like a magnet. everything gonna be ok humbleness hubris calm the quiet of change. definite power where the branches start. hard thick wood like living stone. all of those things weren't for you they were of you ...

if we want to make the invisible visible we need to be fully transparent.
it's not about talking to the trees and plants it's about listening to them.

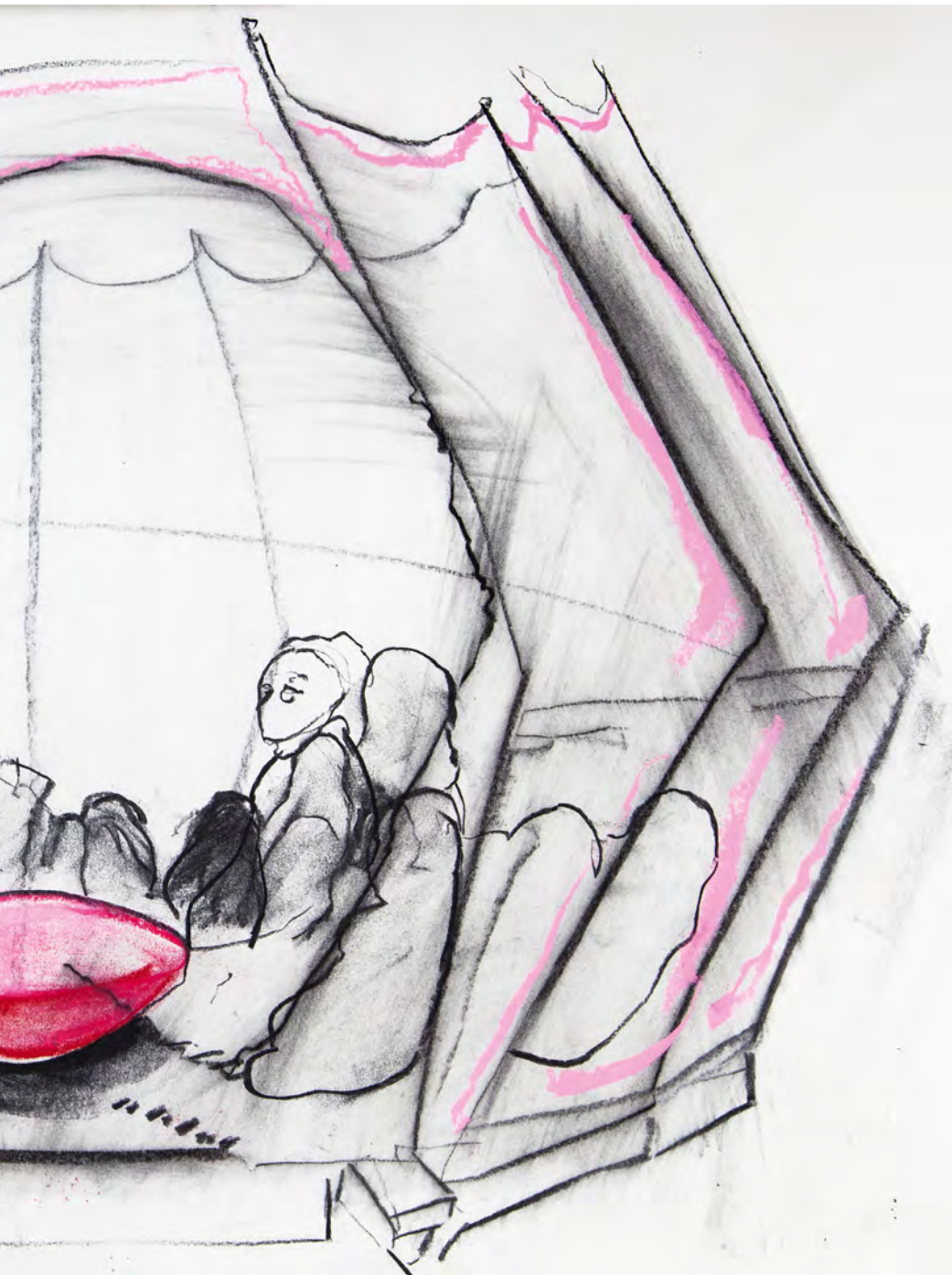
Thoughts on “Nesting”
by Shelley Etkin
resonance is relationship

is it a spaceship?
is it a cradle?
is it a cave?
is it a womb?
is it a cell?

is it open?
is it mine?
is it yours?
is it ours?
is it an “it”?

what are the cultures of this nest?
what ways of being with oneself,
with each other, with place does
this nest support?
who lives in this nest?
how can we learn from and with
young beings, who may have
just begun to distinguish between
themselves and the world
around them?





we are nesting in this place
we placed it here for now
we are always
in particular place

lay your body down
in the belly of the beast

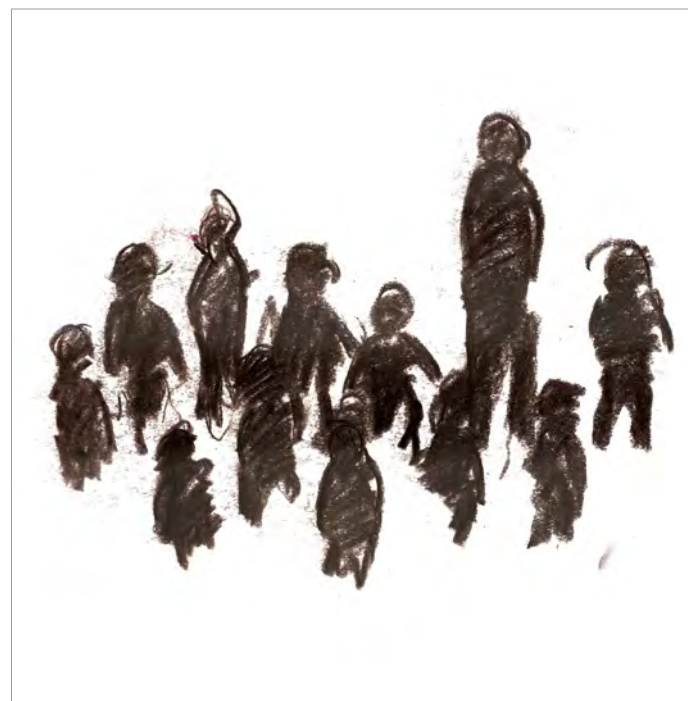
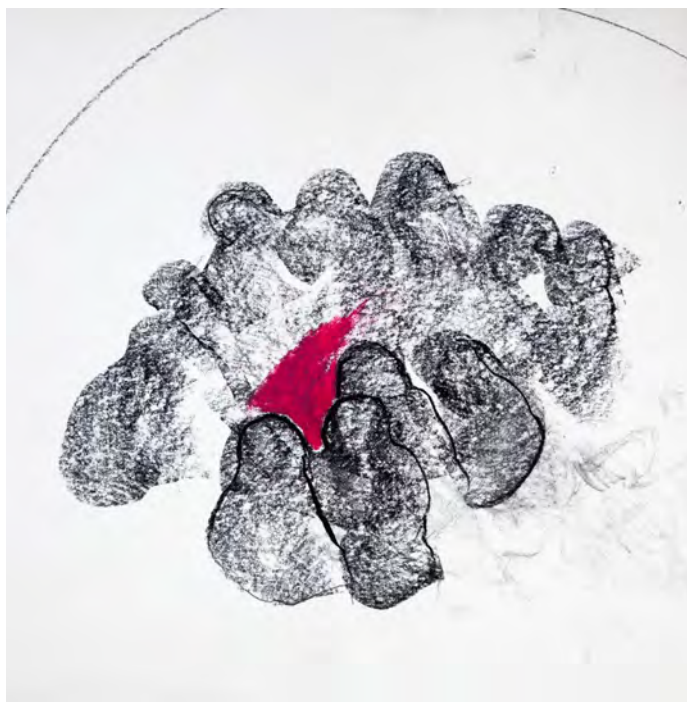
let the insides and
outsides blend

improvised lullabies came
singing bowls came
wood and pink string came
wood became sanded and sculpted
string became knit, woven and bound
humans came, very young and older and in between
curved spines reclined, close to the ground, opening to the sky
breath became wind became sound, rising like smoke

how do we invite?
how does the nest host?
can our listening support their listening?
what do we dream from this place? in this place? of this place?
how much and how little to offer?
what are we doing here?
who are we here?

sound is always contained in listening
within and around us are many membranes

rocking
singing
swaying
brewing
we tried to practice flying through our voices





is it a lighthouse?
are we conducting rods?
is it an anchor?
are we hiding in plain sight?
is it an unidentified flying object?

this nest is a non-invasive presence in place
for temporary landing
and journeying

migratory animals
find places to stay a while
restore and build the next generation
these places are not to be conquered, settled, or owned
they are temporary habitats

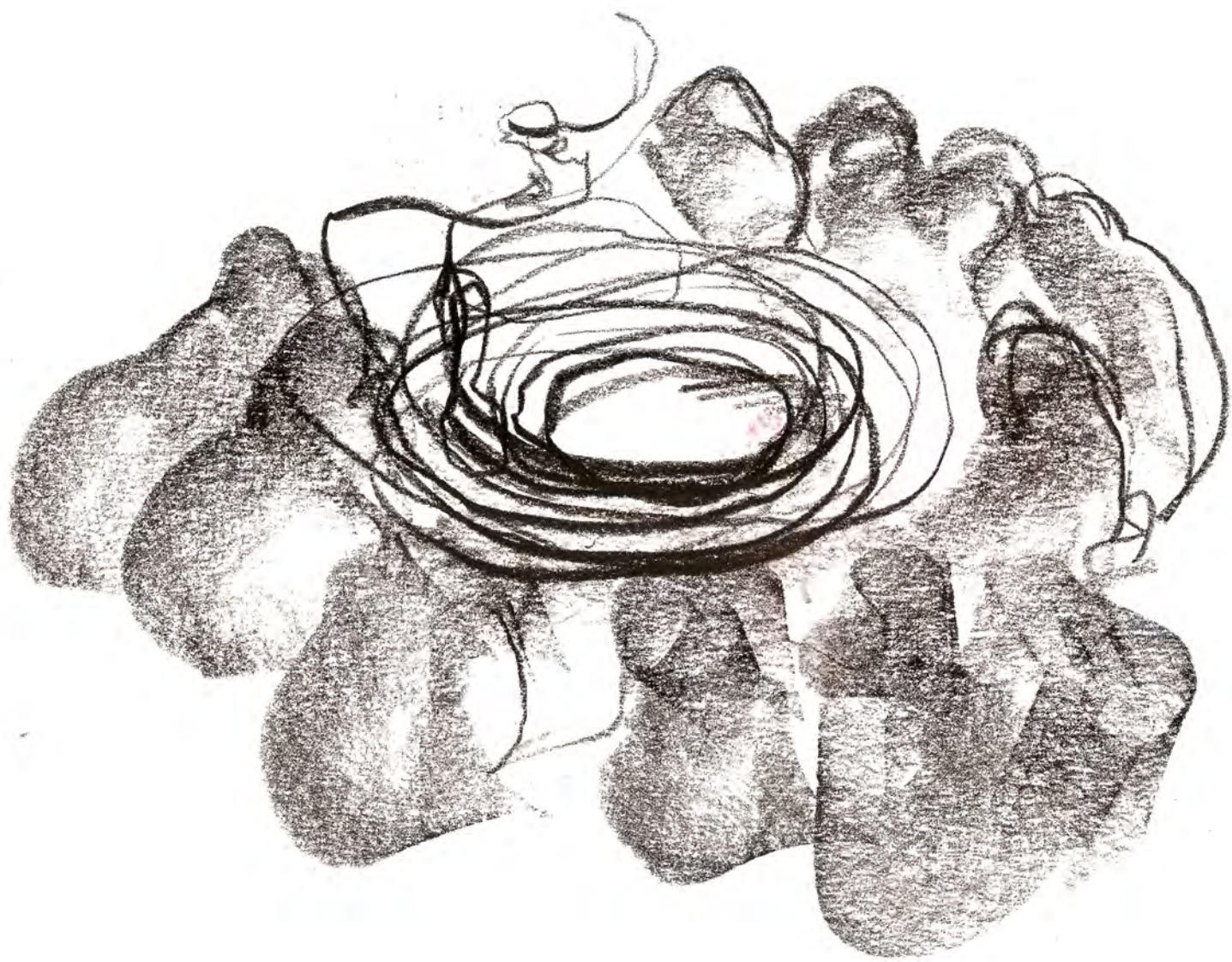
what is in the center?
how can we orient inwards and outwards at the same time?
to the margins, the whole city, beyond?
where are our centers?

this is not about us, it's about something
much older, much bigger, much longer

is it a hole?
is it a bathtub?
is it a basket?
is it a portal?

we try to acknowledge the habits of territory we make

when birds build nests,
their architecture sources from the surrounding environment
a nest's place is reflected in its form
in this nest,
it is the experience of temporarily being together
which forms the experiential-architecture
a living process
of nesting





Breath and Beat

On “KUUKI” and “Future Beats”: Two interactive performances for the very young

Alicja Morawska-Rubczak

In this text I would like to closely consider two interactive performances created especially for very young spectators: first, “KUUKI”, a co-production of Japan Union of Theatrical Companies for Children and Young People (Tokyo/Japan) with Art Fraction Foundation (Poznań/Poland), and secondly, Theater o.N.’s piece entitled “Future Beats”. Both productions are dedicated to the youngest age group: children under two years old, accompanied by their trusted adult caregivers.

As “KUUKI’s” director, I want to share the experience of the production process and present some initial inspirations and ideas that arose during its development. Further, I will reflect on the German production in relation to some basic concepts in “KUUKI”, such as considerations on children’s subjectivity, their participation and exploration of spaces, and the role of adults.

“KUUKI” – Creation process

The performance piece “KUUKI” is a Japanese-Polish production, for which JIENKYO in Tokyo engaged the creative duo of Barbara Malecka and Alicja Morawska-Rubczak. For nearly ten years we have been active in developing the growing field of theater for the youngest in Poland and in promoting Polish theater for children internationally. As a stage designer-director team, we create performances aimed at children younger than three years. In addition to our artistic work, we have also created the most significant international festival of arts for the early years in Poland: Sztuka Szuka Malucha.

“KUUKI’s” premiere (in July 2017 in Poznań and Tokyo) was preceded by actions promoting theater for the early years. In Tokyo in Autumn 2016, we gave a lecture to an audience of almost a hundred, and held a series of workshops for artists, educators and students interested in this field of the arts. Furthermore, activities before and during the production period were attended and documented by a group of Japanese researchers, including Miki Kawanaka, Maho Nakaichi and Ai Osawa.

The workshop was a form of audition, enabling us to select the cast for our production. This was an excellent opportunity to see the artists in action, get to know them and learn some of their thoughts, preliminary assumptions, expectations, and ideas about theater for babies. We accepted four candidates for a second qualification and finally created the performance with two tal-

ented and dedicated dancers, Maho Harada and Noriko Matshuda. This team was joined by an outstanding Japanese accordionist, Kanako Kato, who has won multiple awards for her original work, both in Japan’s Accordion Competition and abroad in the French Accordion Contest. Outside of Japan, she has collaborated with artists from Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland) and from Italy, England, and France. “KUUKI” is her debut in theater for very young children.



This collaboration highlights the practice of inviting outstanding artists from outside the world of arts for children to create performances for babies; I had developed this procedure in the field in Poland with world-renowned composer and musician Wacław Zimpel, who previously created music for three of my pieces.

In addition to the cast, we also invited the most engaged individuals from the workshops to take part in the intensive training that opened our rehearsal period in June 2017. During this process, we explored the essence of air, the subject of the piece, and tested our creative tools for works for babies. Furthermore, we focused on social and cultural aspects of creating performances for families with infants within the very specific context of the country and era in which they live and grow up. It was greatly significant to me to share a comprehensible method of creating performanc-

es for the very young and to inspire the artists in their creative research. Most of all, I wished to convey to the whole team the importance of treating their audience seriously and building an artistic dialog. Finally, I wanted to emphasize that art for babies can be a great answer to our adult questions about the human global condition today.



“KUUKI” – Inspirations

For the initial process of developing “KUUKI”, I considered the cross-cultural context in which we would be working. Moreover, I searched for a theme that could connect us all, regardless of our experience, country of origin and age. The solution was banal and very ambiguous at the same time: The air is essential to all of us. My production development preparations coincided with a difficult period of high air pollution and an increasing problem with smog in my country. Thus, the topic turned out to be political as well as vital. I discussed all these ideas with the creative team during the entire rehearsal process. Although we do not relate this experience to the audience, the process of building meaning and sense pulsates through the bloodstream of the production, sets its rhythm, and imbeds itself in the unspoken. It also brought us closer to our choice for the title of the piece. 空気 (kuuki) is the Japanese word for air, but it consists of kanji signs defining sky, atmosphere, and energy at the same time. This word became a guidepost for us in our scenographic and choreographic research and also found its echoes in the musical composition. The participation of set designer Barbara Malecka and composer Kanako Kato in the entire creative production process strongly influenced the quality of the work.

In closing, it is worth mentioning a few of the air-inspired ideas that we developed in “KUUKI”. In the field of scenic design, we use air plants and kokedamas (hanging/flying gardens) as part of the

set, and the breathing of the accordion and of the dancers as an essential element of the soundscape and the choreography, enhanced by balloons attached to dancers’ bodies. The set design is neither complicated nor extensive; its essential elements are materials that became a sort of onstage partner for the performers. A transparent curtain, dividing the stage into two sections, moves whenever the dancers start to move. The elastic material connecting the dancers’ bodies at the beginning of the performance creates wind and influences the whole choreographic sequence. So do the balloons that fly and dance, defining the stage set, while also motivating the audience to participate.

“KUUKI” – Concepts of participation

Everyone – from young to old – experiences it daily, yet air constantly mystifies us with its elusiveness and invisibility, enchants us with the promise of buoyancy, allures us with the possibility of flight and twirling. The dancers and musician of “KUUKI” draw the viewers along on a search for the materiality of this very fleeting element. They invite the air to be touched, felt, heard and experienced by the audience. Artists, babies, and their caretakers look to each other for mutual inspirations. Movement, sound, and image are filled with air. Thus, the “kuuki” became one of the actors sharing the stage with the audience.

To make air more visible, we wanted to experiment with the children’s perception and focus. Thus, the first part (about twelve minutes) is a choreographed dance sequence, during which the audience is asked to watch, rather than act. This does not mean that the performers reject interaction. However, to build a certain tension, anticipation and curiosity about the world behind the curtain, we ask parents to sit with their children on pillows in the seating area. After the curtain has opened, the performers invite the families to explore the hidden world of the aspects of air. The style of participation is entirely up to the viewers. They are not required to do anything, which results in very diverse dynamics in this segment – from calm, complete withdrawal to active co-creation or to playful, even fully destructive force. In this second part, spectators become “spect-actors.” This expression from Augusto Boal can be very useful in describing the audience’s role in performances for the very young, and is also helpful in depicting some participation strategies in “Future Beats”.

“Future Beats” – Reflections

“Future Beats” is Theater o.N.’s first production dedicated to children this young (from 6 months to 2 years old), which impacted the creation process tremendously. No boundary appears between the performers and spectators. Three creators perform in the midst of the audience. In a smooth division of roles, just for the sake of order, we could divide them as follows: dancer Nasheeka Nedsreal, musician Bernd Sikora and musician/performer Andreas Pichler. They create the entire stage world with their

bodies and voices and by playing specially designed instruments. Built and invented by Bernd Sikora, the musical objects are artistic sculptures made of resounding elements, lights and design details that reveal themselves as a source of creative stimulus. During the interactive performance, they are not only used by the performers but also discovered and explored by the little ones and their trusted adults (indispensable partners supporting every action and interaction). The audience members are co-creators in the whole process – visible, audible, resonating in the space. Even their passivity is never truly passive, but is rather a less visible, less distracting form of activity with a different energy. The creators want to include these energies and treat them with respect. I relate powerfully to this idea of treating the audience very seriously, with the greatest respect and awareness of its needs. When making performances for babies and their caretakers, we need to address their comfort and safety, but also be open to their different ways of participating.

Looking at the diversity of those two productions with their different aesthetic and artistic conceptions, I found, in addition to some shared participation strategies, a significant common factor between them: The immersion of the stage world into the most primary natural elements or activities of all human beings – the breath and the heartbeat. We could call them the foundational concept of these productions. These vital elements – the heartbeat as rhythm and the sound of the breath as melody – form a specific poetics in “KUUKI” and “Future Beats”, two pieces created separately, but with a shared respect for the little ones.





“Future Beats” – An interplay for the senses

Madeleine Fahl

When I describe a performance piece for babies aged six months and up that I have attended in its rehearsal phase with my nearly 15-month-old son, the reactions I get from those around me are often interested, but first mainly quizzical, surprised and rather amused. My neighbor voices his skepticism on the subject with an instant remark: “What is that, puppet theater or Brecht already?” My impromptu reply is that it is neither one nor the other. Rather, the challenge lies in developing a play aimed at precisely this age group.

I believe that this short anecdote presents a view that seems widespread in much of society: the assumption that theater is simply not possible for babies, since they are unable to follow the action of a play. Therefore, what I had seen could not possibly be real theater.

In my opinion, this line of thinking underestimates infants, with all of the available abilities they have been using since birth, at the latest, to perceive their surroundings. This approach reflects an adult and very conventional understanding of theater that actually cannot be reconciled with theater for babies. I intentionally use the term “theater” in this context, for “Future Beats” is certainly that: The artists develop a play for their young audience and orient themselves according to its stage of development.

A healthy newborn can rely on a fully functional sensory system at birth. However, its sensory perceptions vary in strength and must continue to mature. A newborn child has already heard the rhythm of its mother’s heartbeat and the sound and melody of her voice while in the womb (see BZgA 2019a) and prefers acoustic to visual stimuli at first.

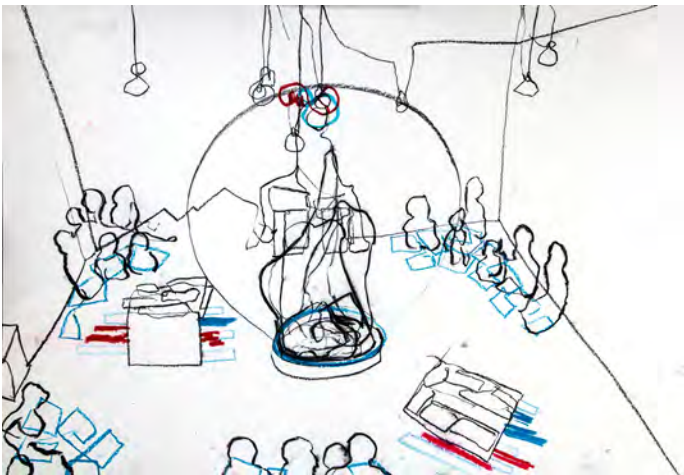
In its first years of life, a child continually refines its hearing ability by perceiving and processing sounds from its surroundings (see BZgA 2019b). In this context, Gerd E. Schäfer (SCHÄFER 2006) describes how newborns are already dependent on sensual experiences in order to assimilate the environment and their surroundings. However, this occurs only within the scope of possibilities offered to them from outside (see FAHL 2014, page 10 f.). Schäfer emphasizes that, in accessing the world, the child is primarily engaged in understanding it sensually, imitating, reshaping and redesigning it. Within this process, the outside world is not simply depicted, but structured and evaluated on the basis of memories and experiences. In addition to visual information, acoustic, physical, atmospheric and emotional perceptions are also recorded and

processed. This leads to more comprehensive and reliable information. Given this background, in order to gain access to the world, children need diverse, multifaceted opportunities for experience that offer them more precise information for their interpretation of the world and their own experiences (see FAHL 2014, page 11).

Accordingly, from the very start, the performers of “Future Beats” pursue the notion of meeting their young spectators at their current stage of development. This understanding of theater is grounded in a corresponding image of the competent infant, from the production’s initial development throughout its realization. “Young children are recognized to be complete personalities at full value, capable of educating and developing themselves, if only they are allowed to do so” (DOMRÖS 2015, page 36). Specifically, this means developing a play that appeals to the senses and



offers very young viewers opportunities for aesthetic interaction. In this context, babies and their adult companions are invited to consecutive rehearsals as a source of immediate feedback. Director Bernd Sikora describes this very special target group after the first rehearsals as even more impartial than an audience aged



two and up. By contrast, the perceptions of young babies are even more elementary, he says; their reactions are immediately recognizable. So the narrative dramatic arc shifts further into the background.

Moments of aesthetic of experience have a primary significance for children's educational processes, since infants and toddlers perceive their environment through sensual experiences while engaging with caregivers and objects, thereby developing learning and perception strategies (see REINWAND 2010, page 4).

So it is not surprising how little spectators follow "Future Beats" on stage with such concentrated fascination. Most children and their adult caregivers sit on small cushions in a semicircle at the edge of the stage, directly in the midst of the action. The setting is designed so that no infant must be held in place. If a baby becomes curious and wants to explore the space independently, the performance structure enables it to do so. To prevent uncertainty, this possibility is communicated to the companion adults in advance. However, right at the outset, most children sit on laps or very close to their caregivers to watch what happens. The lights dim, followed by the first soft beats on the handmade stone instruments. In the center, a woman with long braids squats in a large upturned drum and rises very slowly to the rhythm of the music. She looks around and smiles. The anticipation of what might come next is palpable in the babies as well as the adults. The three performers lift their voices together in a song, relaxing and caressing the spirit with a gentle melody. However, any assumptions that the performance is just awash in a warm rain of shallow beats and songs are mistaken. The rhythms change constantly – loud and quiet, fast and slow, the performer from the center dances and travels through the space, sometimes in calm movements, sometimes in quicker leaps. Standing, lying, squatting, sitting, with her legs and arms raised or to the side, always shifting form. She walks across the stage and taps the light bulbs hanging from the ceiling, which then glow in different colors. Nearly all the babies visibly follow the action with their gaze, lamp by lamp, along with repeated pointing fingers and audible expressions of "There!". Each performance varies slightly, because the performers react to the babies' individual reactions throughout the play. Some babies are bold and quickly set off on their own explorations, others wait a little longer or stay in the safe harbor close to their caregiver. The youngest baby I observed during a performance is two months old. She is held in her mother's arms, occasionally breastfed, and sits quiet on Mama's lap for long periods, her eyes open, looking towards the stage. A ten-month-old girl observes very attentively for a long time, then crawls quickly to the center of the stage and climbs onto the drum. An up-and-down climbing game begins. Right after the first beats, an eleven-month-old boy gets interested in the instruments and begins to strike the pipes as well. With every performance, my son is drawn to the stage more quickly for his own experiments. While he sat

on my lap at the first rehearsal for a long while, by the fourth showing, from early on he won't be held back. He moves across the stage to the sounds, while the performers matter-of-factly roll the drum back and forth, maneuvering around him. Clearly the performers constantly receive impulses from their young audiences, creating new material. It is noticeable that the somewhat older children aged two and up find the dimmed lights and loud drumbeats challenging. This may be related to the fact that children at this age develop a huge capacity for imagination and the boundaries between reality and fantasy become fluid (see BZgA 2019c). The darkness is not tangible, so frightening ideas might emerge from the subconscious. But by the time the performers pass out mallets for the instruments, everyone joins together on stage in creative chaos.



“Future Beats” proves that a sensual approach makes theater for babies possible. It gives the young audience another level of access to the environment; adults have a wonderful opportunity to accompany them and marvel at the fascination and energy with which they discover the world.

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“Did you think of the children?» A conversation we started

Marie Yan

Including an essay by Karina Griffith:

For those children in the lonely place

In the genesis of the FRATZ International 2019 talk “Did you think of the children?”, which occurred on the 6th of May, at first there were two artists: visual artist Freddy Tsimba, invited to the FRATZ Symposium along with the screening of the film “Système K”,¹ and Hannah Biedermann, director of theatre for youth and children. Freddy Tsimba works mostly on monumental sculptures, using metals scraps, bullet cases, the blacksmith’s craft. At the time of the festival, Hannah Biedermann’s work had recently gotten a lot of attention because of a debate surrounding her piece “Alle Jahre wieder” (“Year after year”), presented by the Schauspielhaus Bochum in place of the traditional “Wintermärchen” (winter’s tales), in which she had discussed different traditions with a culturally and racially diverse cast.



In the works of both artists, there was, and is, an urgency to work with contemporary material and stories. Yet, their media show a clear contrast between them: metal sculptures resisting the passage of time versus ephemeral theatre pieces. The relation to time, as well as the racial dynamics surrounding the reception of their work, would be the centre from which they could exchange. Keeping in mind that the theme of this year’s Symposium was “Another World” – a future world, the choice of a third guest became obvious, whose work would have directly addressed how

the future could look like. That is how I suggested we invite the curator and filmmaker Karina Griffith to join us. Her work on the idea of repair and reparations, which permeated the 2017 “Republik Repair” festival at Berlin’s Ballhaus Naunynstraße, was very much about imagining the future: a future with repaired societies, as she describes in the account below. What, then, was the relevance of their conversation for a children’s theatre festival – moreover, one for very young children? At the time of planning the festival, the Fridays for Future strikes had just started. Children and teenagers of all ages were now on the streets, questioning generations of adults for the decisions they had made that now threatened the collapse of our ecosystems. This led to the question, “Did you think of the children?” as in: Did you, did we, did I, take children into consideration when making decisions about art practices or organisation, about anything that might shape the world, the space into which children move and grow? What is this “other world?” When and where is it taking place? For and by whom is it being built?



This is how this conversation started, before an audience of theatre-makers, artists, students and cultural workers. The conversation was held under quite unique multilingual circumstances. Each of the panellists wished to speak in one of their native languages:

Karina Griffith in English, Freddy Tsimba in French, Hannah Biedermann in German. We had agreed that the discussion would be intelligible for English speakers. This led to a rather complex situation of having to translate from German to English and French to English for the audience, and from German to French and English to French for Freddy Tsimba, a feat accomplished by interpreter and director Serge Fouhakue. The process created moments of waiting; I was told afterwards that these were also moments for reflection, as the time needed for translation allowed for things to slow down and find space.

The following rendition of the conversation, which I had the pleasure and honour to moderate, is a subjective selection of our exchanges.² It does not follow the chronological order of the conversation, but rather, tries to bring together related parts of the conversation.

The discussion's starting point was the critiques received by Hannah Biedermann's production "Alle Jahre wieder". Teachers and parents criticised that the show dealt with conflicts. One of the cast members, Mercy Dorcas Otieno, a Black actress³ born in Kenya, told the story during the play of how she was working as an au pair in Germany and got evicted from her host family's home at Christmastime without even a pair of shoes on. Adults' critiques deemed this story, among others, to be inappropriate for children at that time of the year.

Reacting to this, Karina Griffith first introduced her work on the festival "Republik Repair":

Karina Griffith: These ten points⁴ were a great sort of questions to look at the Black experience across the world. This transnational experience. The festival took each of the ten and asked artists, activists, performers to address them. So we had not only panel discussions, but we also had artists. It involved theatre, workshops; we had beautiful exhibitions of collage work... What would it mean, what would reparations look like? Reparations for the Nama and Herero, reparations for the slave trade... What does reparations, repair, look like, if we were to repair our communities? You said that the critique was that children have the right that nothing bad at Christmas happens or at least to have this kind of picture, "dass sie sich damit nicht beschäftigen müssen."⁵ There I have to ask: but what about that child *she* was, *she* was a child and *she* had a bad experience at Christmas. Which children have the right to not have bad experiences? This idea of universality: who really has the right to have all the rights of men? I really think this idea of "*the childhood*" is something; something we want to believe in. Going back to this idea of childhood. I can speak for my experiences, my Black childhood: I think and I know it would have been different growing up in Germany, growing up in Canada.⁶ But definitely there are conversations Black parents have with their children that white parents don't have with their children:

how to deal with police, how to deal with authority... And it comes from an experience where Black children are not considered children. They were considered workers, they were considered technology – if you think about the slave. There is no play for the Black child. When we speak about the children, who are we really speaking about? Because it is not a universal experience of being free from these types of experiences, institutions. It is not a given for every single child. And so, when I think about the festival, this probably is what we are talking about when we talk about repairing. We are talking about a repair on both sides, not just repair for the victim but for the entire society and this of course includes children. This perspective of *reparatory imaginings*, this perspective from the inner child.



Freddy Tsimba reacted to this statement and stressed that culture had no borders; to decide what should or not become part of a representation of Christmas was, in itself, hurtful. I invited him to go on by presenting one piece of his work:

Freddy Tsimba: "Au delà de l'espoir"⁷ is a work made with cartridges cases recovered in Congo because Congo⁸ is a country that has been at war for twenty years. I recovered cases that were being shot at houses, at people. This work is in Brussels in a public place; incidentally, it is the first work by an African man in Europe. It's a story: the model for this sculpture is a woman who was raped and tortured in a place hidden deep in Kinshasa. I went to visit her, followed her, and several times she told me her story. And one day I went there and the other women told me that she had tried to have an abortion. The story changed in my head, I said: "I'm going to make a woman who failed her abortion, but I don't want to show that moment, I want to show a woman standing up, a woman who owns her life. Decides to own, as well, that the child will be born a little handicapped. But this child will look innocent because he'll say: "I didn't want my mum to be raped,



but we are looking ahead, life is here.” This woman, she has her mouth open, she screams, but her cry resounds in the emptiness because no one hears that cry. And the child, when we see it, it’s there as if it were playing. So this story is the story of a life, the story of a whole people who are fighting in Congo, who are asking themselves questions. About what is happening to them in Congo, which is such a rich country, no other country is richer than Congo, but we can only see the misery. It’s a work that asks these questions.

Marie Yan: What I find very beautiful in your representation is that you have this adult, gone through terrible things, but you thought of the figure of the child as one that has an experience of his or her own, an experience that’s different because you decided to represent him or her playing. I think it’s quite a strong statement about what exactly is the status of the child.

Hannah Biedermann: A thought about the sculpture: that, of course, nobody asks if the children are allowed to see it. Because they are just passing by. Maybe it leads to a conversation if the children understand it differently or not. Feel differently about it. Maybe they are on the way with their parents and they would ask about it.

Following on the comments about her piece, Hannah Biedermann developed her reflections on the critiques she heard – which were mostly expressed on behalf of her audience in Bochum, rather than by the audience itself.

Hannah Biedermann: I believe that when you talk about “understanding” like that, you think you’ve already understood something. I think I haven’t understood anything. That’s why I can’t even think about how to make someone understand something.

People grow up differently, in different countries; today in Germany, children are also growing up in different conditions from one another, financial ones, for example. How the parents are educated or which ethnicity or origin their parents have or bring with them also matters. The experience is, again, more diverse in the audience than I foresee it, therefore I can think even less that I have to tell something to the audience, but rather that I have to listen to it. And that led, for example, to research through interviews with children – something I always do. My starting point is to assume that the children are the experts in what they experience. In the play, among other things, you see a Turkish wedding. I tried to convey to them how is this wedding celebrated and what rituals take place. Since in Bochum, the largest immigrant group is of Turkish origin, I expected that some of the children would recognise this wedding. And they just totally did. They celebrated this dance and got up and went along with it, and somehow the ones who didn’t understand that asked their friends to explain it to them after the play. And here something happens: In this short moment, how the position of power – who, when, knows about something – can change. Which for others, I think, was a provocation. The goal is simply this: we’re doing a play for the city’s diverse society. The learning process continues with listening and understanding how different we are. How we need to refrain from drawing only on our own experience again and again, thinking how probably everyone else would have had the same experience. How to take yourself out of the equation even though you’re the one directing, I think that’s a very long exercise, but it’s always been the way forward.

I opened the round of questions quite early on in the discussion and the audience was invited to address the panelists. Several of our guest artists and professionals took up the opportunity:

Sisters Hope:⁹ I think strong reactions to what we do, sometimes, is something we don’t necessarily have to fear. Because we don’t work to please our entire audience. We also have the path to the future, we talk about the path to change, and when we do so, we change the status quo. We will always rub someone the wrong way. And hopefully this conversation will spark something. The perspective of the children and the idea that, in order to enjoy art, you need a certain level of cognition, that you have to be able to reflect on a certain level – that’s a very conservative approach.

I think we want to affect the people who see our work, so it’s about how everybody can be affected by something. It’s interesting we pose this question in this frame, in this piece¹⁰, because there are lots of things children don’t choose. We don’t choose to go to school; we don’t choose that we are forced to use a schedule in school. We don’t choose the work structure – there are structures all over society. That’s interesting, this reaction for this particular piece, because in reality, we never have the choice.

Lwanda Sindaphi:¹¹ When you speak of power structures: by sitting here and talking about the future, the children's future, we have already acknowledged our relationship with children. I think we have carried now this notion of homogenising the future. You are talking about imagining, about positivities, something that could be: we have to make sure that we don't homogenise the future of children. You raised an important point. It's about which body matters. Where I come from, in South Africa, before the play or after the play the institution would organise food and drinks for children. Because those children, they come from economically and racially marginalised spaces, they come from disadvantaged spaces. These are disadvantaged spaces because of colonial wounds. When they leave the theatre space, they go back to the townships where they face rape, violence, where queer bodies cannot exist. But other children, they don't have to worry about anything. We cannot imagine the same future for a white child and a Black child. Because the Black child carries colonial wounds,



"Dream Space" by Sisters Hope at FRATZ International 2019

exists in a postcolonial space. The Black child has to speak back to the colonial empire before talking about the future of decolonisation. We have to decolonise first before they can speak about the future. For a white child, the space already favours their body, their future is bright: they don't have to talk back to the colonial empire, they just need to reimagine. When you put the two children together, they can't speak the same language because their relationship is of the coloniser and the colonised. I say that I have to speak back for this person first, I have to dismantle the power structure, the power structure that exists also between Berlin and Africa. The future for a child in Congo is not the same as the one in Berlin, those futures are different, so we have to, when we talk about this, talk about that relation.

Tony Reekie:¹² Picking up on some of the points being made: I think homogenisation is really something you need to take on board. You have to look at different contexts as well. Class is a huge issue, poverty is a huge issue in lots and lots of areas – where children again are taken out of the loop. It's not a comparison in any way at all with experience in different parts of the world, but there are realities that children face in different places. I work in one of my jobs in a place in Edinburgh where, by seven years old, the children know exactly how to handle the police.



"Paired", directed by Lwanda Sindaphi, at FRATZ International 2019

The one thing I loved about Freddy Tsimba's work, one of many many things, was that the audience, including the children, entered the space at exactly the same level as everybody else.¹³ That meeting space was for everybody and the children were part of that and they are on equal standards with everybody else, being part of that discussion, definitely part of it, looking at the art, discussing it.

Ultimately children have no power; we have all this power and in the end, we can tell them things, and look at the state of the world – who are we to tell them anything? So we have to keep on thinking, really thinking as we move along.

The conversation that we started on this day around privilege, time, young audiences and more, was an intense one, not devoid of its own flaws. A member of the audience raised the point that no children were present in the room as we talked. So we had reproduced the privilege that we grown-ups have of talking about the children, rather than with them. A critique I accept and which calls for further reflection on the discussion's format and its guests. I closed the event suggesting this was only the first part of the conversation. There was, I think, some value in having this space to talk about racial and cultural privilege and representa-

tion in the arts, which is still not a given common ground among adults – as the reactions to Hannah Biedermann’s work have shown. As someone asked earlier during the discussion, how do we create room to discuss? Maybe this was an occasion to prepare “not a safe space, but a safer space,” as Karina Griffith recalled when talking about her own festival. That night, I think we laid a foundation together for further exchange, hoping to then find a model for inviting children into a space where we could meet them eye to eye.

I asked Karina Griffith, who had been very much an observer at the festival, to write a short piece to reflect on her experience of this discussion and expand on the thoughts she had expressed. This essay follows and offers, I think, a great last word as an opening and a challenge overall:

For those children in the lonely place: A reflection by Karina Griffith

When I think back on the discussion “Did you think of the children?” at FRATZ, the classic Whitney Houston ballad, “The Greatest Love of All”, plays in my head.¹⁴ The lyrics start with the statement: “I believe that children are our future.” Whitney later exclaims that the greatest love must be found inside yourself. A quaint enough statement, but one stanza in the song suggests that her self-reliance is a defence strategy:

*“I never found anyone who fulfill my needs
A lonely place to be
And so I learned to depend on me”*

This survival mechanism of depending on yourself is a tactic learned early for Black children in predominantly white societies. The lesson is as integral as your ABCs: a) do not expect society to support you; b) don’t talk back to police; c) always carry ID and a receipt for your purchases.

At the start of her seminal essay, “The Oppositional Gaze”, author, feminist and social activist bell hooks recalls a childhood memory. Often punished for staring, hooks learned as a girl that Black looks carry power. She connects this to the historical reality that *white* slave owners in the United States would punish Black enslaved people for returning their gaze.¹⁵

I remember when, as a child, I first realized that I was being watched more closely than other children. My father had brought me to a birthday party. When I took off my shoes, he saw that I had a hole in my sock. “Put on your shoes,” he said to me sternly, and bashfully excused us with the explanation that he forgot something. We drove all the way back across town to our house in silence. “Doesn’t this child have a decent pair of socks?!” he bel-
lowed when we entered the house. Back in the car, wearing a pair

of his, I endured the silence again as we drove back to my *white* friend’s place.



When I think of the children, I think of reparations.¹⁶ Reparations would mean that all youth would feel valued and protected in their societies, regardless of class, sexual orientation, ability or race. It would mean that all children can hold a gaze, wear socks with holes without their parents feeling they will be less cared for, or wear hoodies when they go out at night to buy candy without fear of being shot.¹⁷ This repair that I speak of would benefit not just Black children, but all children, all of us.

Reparations would mean that all children would feel valued and protected in their societies. Performing arts has a role to play in this repair by reaching out to the children in the “lonely place.” Theatre practitioners can amplify their voices, put their complex experiences on stage, so that children can return the gaze of those who expect them to grow up more quickly other because they are more closely watched. Performing arts for children can flourish when we let go of the cozy assumption of a “universal childhood experience” and delve into the specificities of our existences. It’s more difficult, but as Whitney promises at the end of her song, we’ll find our strength in love.

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- 1 “Système K”, documentary film about the flourishing independent art scene in Congolese capital Kinshasa, directed by Renaud Barret, featuring portraits of Freddy Tsimba and others.
 - 2 It was transcribed from a recording by the co-curator of the symposium, Doreen Markert.
 - 3 “Black” is capitalised in this text because the word was reclaimed as an identity, starting in the 1920s with author W.E.B. Du Bois demanding for the word “negro” (Spanish for “black”) to be capitalised in the context of the United States. This spelling was then adopted in other languages. Capitalisation is a gesture of self-determination and self-definition that demands the respect and recognition of a diverse Black community sharing a common experience. This reappropriation of the word does not, however, contradict the fact that the category itself is a social construct that arose from a racist classification of humanity.
For further readings: Ask a Radical Copyeditor: Black with a Capital “B”, Alex Kapitan, <https://radicalcopyeditor.com/2016/09/21/black-with-a-capital-b/>
 - 4 The 10-Point Reparation Plan defined by the Caribbean Reparations Commission for the region’s indigenous and African descendant communities’ victims of Crime against Humanity: <http://caricomreparations.org/caricom/caricoms-10-point-reparation-plan>
 - 5 “So they don’t have to think about it,” literally “to deal with/be bothered by” it.
 - 6 R.I.P. Oury Jalloh (1968–2005)
 - 7 “Beyond hope”, bullet cases, 2007, Brussels
 - 8 This refers to the Democratic Republic of Congo.
 - 9 Sisters Hope is a performance group and a movement based in Copenhagen that works “toward manifesting a more sensuous and poetic educational system.” They were invited to FRATZ International for several interventions.
 - 10 Referring to Hannah Biedermann’s piece, one of the underlying critiques of her play has been that children were subjected to an issue, instead of being entertained by a winter tale.
 - 11 Lwanda Sindaphi is founder and director of KUDU Productions. A South African director, actor and author, he was invited to the festival accompanying a piece he directed, “Paired”.
 - 12 Tony Reekie is a curator and theatre producer. He was the programmer of the Imagine Festival in Edinburgh for a decade.
 - 13 “La maison machette” (2012), is another striking artwork by Freddy Tsimba, which he presented during the discussion: A house made of 999 machetes, displayed among others at Kinshasa’s marketplace. Karina Griffith commenting on it during the discussion: “This was artwork and discussion room and exhibition place and place of, in a way, violence and trauma all at once.” The work was featured in the film “Système K”, which can be viewed on the artist’s website: www.freddytsimba.com
 - 14 Whitney Houston’s 1985 version was a cover of the George Benson version from 1977.
 - 15 hooks, bell. “The Oppositional Gaze”, in: *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston 1992, pages 115–131
 - 16 While children were not the explicit audience of my curatorial project “Republik Repair: Ten Points, Ten Demands, One Festival – Reparatory Imaginings from Black Berlin” which took place at Ballhaus Naunynstraße, Berlin, Germany, 23 September – 19 December 2017, their well-being was integral to the new futures we were creating in the space of the festival. <http://www.ballhausnaunynstrasse.de/pdf/repreg-broschuere-lowres.pdf>
 - 17 R.I.P. Trayvon Martin (1995–2012)



Photo: Ilya Noe

Shelley Etkin *Transdisciplinary artist, educator, and gardener*

With roots in the USA and Israel, Shelley's works combine dance, ecology, pedagogy, curation, and community organizing. She works independently and collaboratively in a range of environments hosting practices of embodiment and land-relations, including "Ponderosa" – a rural artist residency in Germany where she facilitates the "Garden as Studio" platform. Shelley is engaged in studies of plant medicines and hands-on bodywork modalities. Currently, she is a guest lecturer at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. She is in ongoing collaborations with Laura Burns as "LARK: Living Archive of Re-membered Knowledges", as well as with Angela Schubot and Aune Kallinen, and is part of the international "Hungry Mothers" collective. Shelley holds an M.A. in Ecology and Contemporary Performance (Finland) and B.A. in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (USA).



Photo: Private property

Madeleine Fahl *Childhood educator, children's theater educator*

Madeleine Fahl studied at the Evangelische Hochschule Berlin in the degree program in elementary pedagogy and earned a supplementary qualification as a children's theater educator in this context. As a researcher, she served as a scholarly contributor on the project "Große Sprünge", carried out by Theater o.N. In the scope of her bachelor's thesis, she examined the interplay between theater work with, and theater productions for, the very young. She is engaged in school social work at a Berlin primary school and has just completed the BuT (Federal Association of Theater Pedagogy) professional course in theater education.



Photo: Mikael Owunna

Karina Griffith *Video artist, Curator*

Karina Griffith's curatorial and moving image works explore the themes of fear and fantasy, often focusing on how they relate to belonging. In 2017 she curated the 3-month long festival "Republik Repair: Ten Points, Ten Demands, One Festival of Reparatory Imaginings from Black Berlin" and in 2018 she was the "Decolonizing '68" studio grant holder at DISTRICT Berlin, culminating in her installation "We Call it Love, An Oppositional Screening". Griffith's work has been shown at numerous independent film festivals and galleries and she is a PhD candidate at the University of Toronto's Cinema Studies Institute with a research on Black authorship in German cinema. Since 2018 she is a lecturer in the Art in Context Institute at the Berlin University of the Arts.



Photo: Theresa Beschmidt

Christine Matschke *Independent dance journalist*

Christine Matschke studied modern German literature, art history and French in Wuppertal, at Besançon and at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. She completed her master's studies with a thesis on dance and pursued her interest in dance studies at the Freie Universität Berlin. For several years she worked as an assistant at a Berlin institute of further education, a dramaturgy assistant in Cologne theaters and a press assistant for the "Tanz im August" festival. Today, Christine lives and works as a freelance dance journalist in Berlin. She writes for various print and online media such as the "Berliner Zeitung", "tanz", "tanzraumberlin", "tanzschreiber", and "Missy Magazine". She regards writing about "dance for young audiences" to be one of her professional perspectives.



Photo: Dawid Majewski

Alicja Morawska-Rubczak *Theater educator, director, curator and researcher for children's theater for the very young*

Within the scope of her Ph.D. studies at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Alicja Morawska-Rubczak examined the aesthetics of contemporary children's theater and dance. She is internationally active as a lecturer and workshop leader at conferences and festivals. In 2014 she was a member of the artistic committee at the Warsaw ASSITEJ World Congress. Since 2012 she works as a director of productions for the very young. For her most recent work, "Jungle" (2018), a puppet performance, she received the Wrocław Theater Award for directing and her Opole Drama Theater production "What's going on?" (2018) was awarded the Golden Mask. She has collaborated twice with Theater o.N. as researcher and theater educator for the productions "fliegen & fallen" and "Affinity". She is a member of ITYARN and of the network "Small size".



Photo: Germany 2071

Marie Yan *Author and dramaturg*

Marie Yan is a multilingual author and a dramaturge for dance and theater. Researching dystopian motives and ethics, she regularly writes for young audiences; her play "I need to cross" (6+) entered the repertoire of the city theater of Eskişehir (Turkey) in 2019 and was invited to the festival "Starke Stücke" in 2020. In Berlin since 2016, her dramaturgical work focuses on feminist and postcolonial perspectives – "Unrestricted Contact" (Grupo Oito, 2016), "A Machine to Become_woman" (Natalie Riedelsheimer and Caroline Alves, 2016). In 2019, she took part in the organisation of FRATZ International Symposium.



Photo: David Becroft

Katelyn Stiles *Artist, dancer and film maker*

Katelyn is a visual artist, dancer, and filmmaker specializing in dance film and performance documentation. She has worked professionally as a videographer and editor for the past decade in Berlin and the Bay Area. Moreover, she does live drawing of performance events and the like – as a practice of processual documentation and direct exchange with the artists as well as the audience. Katelyn is Tlingit, a tribal member of the Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. In 2011 she received her Bachelor in Art Practice and Dance/Performance Studies from UC Berkeley and daced professionally in different contexts. Currently she is working on her PhD thesis in Native American Studies at UC Davis.

The **FRATZ Reflections 2019** document research, artistic perspectives and productions of the festival and the symposium FRATZ International 2019.

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