

# Documentation

## “Let’s Talk about Dance – Feedback Lab Goes Public”

6<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> January 2017 during the festival *Tanztage Berlin 2017* at Sophiensæle



„Let’s talk About Dance“, 9. Januar 2017, Festsaal, Sophiensæle

„Let’s Talk About Dance – Feedback Lab Goes Public“ is the title of a series of different audience formats having annually taken place during the dance festival *Tanztage Berlin* since 2015. The audience formats have been developed as a cooperation of *Tanztage Berlin*, *Tanzbüro Berlin*, the module *Feedback Lab* of the international network *Live Long Burning* at *Uferstudios* as well as the *Inter-University Centre for Dance (HZT) Berlin*.

The first „Laboratory on Feedback in Artistic Processes #1“ (January 2014) held by the *Live Long Burning* network and *HZT Berlin* was dedicated to the exploration of feedback – its different forms and impact on artistic processes.

Coming from these investigative processes, in a second step, feedback methods and approaches were specified with the regard to different audience groups and first tested with the festival audience of *Tanztage Berlin* in January 2015: During the festival, Inge Koks and Sonja Augart, Sheena Mc Grandles, Eva Meyer-Keller and Jenny Beyer offered five different feedback formats as initial „try outs“. The aim was to offer and apply diverse approaches, so the spectrum of feedback formats reached from „mapping“ – a graphic reflection of the performance made by the visitors – via physical introduction into the piece up to the „Liz-Lermann-feedback-methode“, where feedback on an artistic work was given in a certain pattern. Also, the methode of „chain reaction“ was tested, where the spectator giving feedback not just referred to the artistic production but also to the previous speaker. And not least, the audience was asked to write down associations, which were discussed afterwards. The artists partly joined these „try outs“.

In 2016, a 8-headed group from *HZT Berlin* and the *Uferstudios* created and offered various “Let’s Talk About Dance – Feedback Lab Goes Public” formats. Different approaches like folding sculptures, word associations, body memories and more were tested in high frequency with an expert audience as well as with interested spectators. These formats based on the results of the second „Laboratory on Feedback in Artistic Processes #2 – Audience“ in January 2015 concentrating on forms of cultural exchange with the audience. By repeating the formats important information was gained, like on the role of the moderator and his impact on the dynamic of the talk. This information was useful to develop „Let’s Talk About Dance – Feedback Lab Goes Public 2017“.

In this – now third – cooperation of „Feedback Lab“ and *Tanztage Berlin* the „Let’s Talk About Dance“-formats were developed and performed by Inge Koks and Sonja Augart. Both decided to reduce the number of methods and to rather focus on formats of verbal exchange in combination with more playful and physical elements. They wanted to see if these elements could help the conversation in getting started in a more ‘organical’ way by using different senses and perception than only using our brains and articulating skills.

So, the “Let’s Talk about Dance”- talks were not about creating a classic post show discussion telling the audience the background or “making” details of the artistic productions. Inge Koks und Sonja Augart much more hold the view that between the performers, the artwork itself and the audience there are various reactions, that can’t be determined in an explanation of the original artistic intention. Contrary to the dominance of the maker’s authorship, Koks and Augart aim to overcome the hierarchic structure between the expert and the audience and to avoid a consuming attitude of the audience. Watching a dance performance to them is an action, opening oneself up to the artwork and it’s possible references and meanings and deciding oneself how to perceive it, bringing up unpredictable emotions, thoughts and ideas. The “Let’s Talk about Dance” formats in 2017 wanted to catch these perceptions and thoughts, enticing a discourse and exchanging ideas between the spectators. The role of the moderator, of course, was crucial in this approach and was played in different ways by Inge Koks and Sonja Augart. The dramaturg and performance researcher Ana Vujanović participated in 3 of 4 formats as an observer giving her impressions back to the moderators.

### **Art as a „kick off“ to public discussions**

In their approach Inge Koks and Sonja Augart refer to the culture of Salons and coffeehouses flourishing in Europe during the 18<sup>th</sup> /19<sup>th</sup> century. At that time the free exchange of opinions and ideas on art created new spheres for the upcoming bourgeois society besides aristocratic conventions.



Salongesellschaft um 1900 in Berlin



Let's talk about dance“, 06. Januar 2017, Berlin

Knowing that the public today is much more complex than it used to be in the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century Inge Koks and Sonja Augart still started their experiment to turn art and dance into a stimulator of public discussions in which audience members play an active role. The diverse dimensions of art experience shall be externalised and the audience shall be strengthened in its self-conception as important resonating cavity to the topics dealt within the production. The artists were partly present as equal participants of the discussions.

Inge Koks and Sonja Augart reflecting their work:

Together with Anna Mülter, artistic director of the *Tanztage* Festival, we decided to do 5 talks<sup>1</sup> during the festival. The performances we connected the talks to were chosen on the basis of the short publicity texts in the program booklet. We went for performances, which seemed to concern themselves with a societal topic. This we did because we wanted talks which spectators could participate in and share their personal opinion, since the aim of the talks was to exchange thoughts and ideas on our present day society.

In our preparation we also discussed the format of the talks and the role of the moderator at length. Did we need an expert? Did we want the participants themselves to decide on which elements they wanted to discuss with regard to the chosen topic? Or did we insert a steering moderator who was responsible for the development of the talk? We decided to have several different formats to see what would work and what not. Important in our preparation discussions was also the set-up of the space itself, since this shapes also the first perceptions of the participating audience members.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the talks didn’t happen since there were no participants. This probably had to do with the show and the audience it raised. It was a premiere and their friends wanted to talk with them instead of with us! It does show how experimenting and of good will the *Tanztage* audience usually is. This might not be as easy in other contexts. Therefore better communication of the talks, it’s format and the content is preferred.

**“Let’s Talk About Dance” on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2017 after the performance „Shade” by Tarren Johnson und Mira O’Brien**



“Let’s Talk About Dance”, 6<sup>th</sup> January 2017, Hochzeitssaal, Sophiensæle

Participants: 19  
Mira O’ Brien is present.

Introduction: Inge Koks  
Observer: Ana Vujanović

### Preparation

The choice for “Shade” was easily made: we liked the idea of talking about algorithms since they seem to become more and more used and influential in society without us really understanding them. In our exchange with the artists also they expressed their interest in the topic for an ‘after talk’. It would have a big role in their performance, but at the moment of the exchange they didn’t know exactly how that would be developed.

With regard to the format of the talk we decided to start with a short introduction on what we ourselves researched on the topic and which could kick-start the discussion. The moderator didn’t have the role of the expert, but more that of a concerned citizen who choose to share thoughts and ask for the participants’ opinions about it. The structure was more ‘laissez-faire’.

### Conclusion

The talk started in a big group of interested participants with immediate responses of the participants. The flow of the discussion – unquestionable an interesting discussion - was rather free and not much controlled or moderated. One aspect making the setting of the discussion complicated was that some of the participants had to leave in the middle of the discussion because they had tickets for the next show. This disturbed the energy of the session.

Based on the amount of participants and their initial responses, there was clearly an interest in the topic of algorithms. However we didn’t succeed in transforming it in an ongoing discussion.

We realised that we should have known more about the topic to make a proper introduction and to be able to respond to remarks of the participants. Also important is a more precise starting question to get the people to talk, especially since we wanted to talk about a certain category of algorithms. We should have made the set-up and aim clearer and direct the discussion more towards the purpose.

### Feedback Ana Vujanović

‘If you choose to introduce a topic you should know more about it. Especially on the topic of algorithms, since not so many people really know the ins and outs, effects and consequences. The concluding question for debating should have been more precise. More knowledge of the topic makes is also easier to moderate since you better understand what people are saying and can place it quicker in a frame from which you can ask further questions or change the directions. Now it took the direction of that almost everything is an algorithm...’

Since we agreed the artist would be present as well, we should have informed her on the specifics of our intended talk, just to see how that coincides with how she used and viewed algorithms. It turned out the artists used the algorithms purely as an instrument to create, without any positioning to this phenomenon. That is not needed of course for the work of art. But it created a certain ambivalence to the talk. With the artist present it seemed almost logical to talk about their use of the algorithm instead of talking on the societal consequences. The questions pops up, like in the other sessions, should the artist be present in these talks?

**“Let’s Talk About Dance” on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2017 after the performance „Obnimashki“ by  
Anna Aristarkhova**



“Let’s Talk About Dance”, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2017, Festsaal, Sophiensæle

Participants: 14  
None of the artists is present  
Augart  
Observer: Ana Vujanović

Physical introduction: Sonja Augart  
Introduction to the topic: Inge Koks & Sonja

### Preparation

Even though we choose for “Obnimashki” because of its reference to love, intimacy and touch, it was difficult to finetune the exact topic. We had difficulties how to approach the topic of hugging, so clearly manifested in the performance. What can you say about it, without it becoming cheesy? It made us realize how tricky certain topics are. We even knew the performance, which in many other cases we did not. Do people want to discuss this after a long night in the theatre? Apparently, they did. Is it because we all know something about it and want to share this? Maybe this is what made it into something valuable. It had an added value to the performance.

We wanted to experiment with adding a different entrance into the actual discussion. We thought this addition would give the talk another experience and would help in digesting the performance, making it more fun and opening up people. Therefore we designed the ‘physical introduction’ of hugging just as the performers did in the show.

We also considered how to bridge the physical introduction to the actual talk. We were aiming for an ‘easy’ transformation. This we created by formulating a utopian question which is (almost) impossible to answer: if we hug more, could we create another society?

For the moderation we choose a loose approach: we only prepared our utopian question and wanted to see what people could do with such a question. We did decide to also make a conclusion at the end, to highlight the diversity of topics being discussed.

### Physical introduction

The participants were invited to come on stage and to build couples. They were asked to look at each other, to move towards each other in different ways, shake hands and to hug each other – quickly, longer and as long as it gets unpleasant for one of them.... then to stop. After the physical part, we made clear we would now end this part and continue with the actual talk and invited them to the circle of chairs we set up. This precise explanation and articulation was important for the participants to know what we were doing. They felt comfortable in this clear set-up.



### Conclusion

Due to its funny quality the physical introduction achieved its aim in getting people to participate in an easier way. This experience created a form of bonding and an open mind in wanting to participate. Also the 'funny' and impossible utopian question had this effect. Even though we ran the risk people couldn't do anything with such a 'big' question, the opposite was true.

Apparently there is a lot to say on the topic, because the talk went almost by itself. The conclusion worked too. It is interesting to give an overview of what has been said. It shows how much was said and addressed possible conclusions of ideas to continue the talk. That is especially interesting for the participants: they experience how much is being said and how the conversation evolved. That shows the value of the talks.

We didn't discuss the performance at all. Only a few people experienced this as a pity. In this case we might have been able to make connections to the performance we saw. The talk might have given us another perspective on it.

### Feedback Ana Vujanović

Concerning the role of the moderator: Sonja gave a playful introduction with an utopian, 'impossible' question which made people laugh and take the discussion more light, less serious. The conclusion worked also, even though it was a bit too long.

**“Let’s Talk About Dance” on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2017 after the performance „The Parallel Side Of the Road“ by Akiles**



“Let’s Talk About Dance”, 14.1.2017, Sophiensæle, Hochzeitssaal

Participants: 13  
The artist is present  
Observer: Ana Vujanović

Physical introduction: Sonja Augart  
Introduction to the topic: Inge Koks & Sonja Augart

Preparation

The topic of spirituality was easily made, but presented us with more difficulties when we elaborated on it. It is such a big topic that we realized pinpointing a certain aspect would be difficult and everybody will probably have such a different opinion on it that it is difficult to start a talk (do we need to have a shared idea of the topic to have an interesting conversation?). To tackle this issue, Ana suggested to us to formulate several concrete questions with pairing concepts as religion and spirituality, love and spirituality, tradition, rituals etc. We followed her suggestion but in a different way. We formulated two broader questions to consider whilst doing the physical introduction and then continued with a series of more concrete questions, questions we ourselves found interesting and fitting to the topic, but also had a dramaturgical line. This would be our most moderated format.

We again started the talk with a physical introduction. Since the topic is so big, we wanted to let people consider their position towards it. We asked the participants just to walk in a constant pace and to ponder on the two questions Sonja asked. This lasted for 3 – 4 minutes.

Even though it was less ‘exciting’ as the hugging exercise, it did help to pave a certain entrance into the talk, as it was a transformation between watching a performance into outing your opinion and experience. You could think of it as a short meditation on the topic, to prepare for the talk and think about it.

We started the actual talk with a quote of the Persian philosopher Rumi and asked the artist how he interpreted this quote. This was meant as a start-up to the talk and also to introduce the artist, who we have been in close contact whilst developing the talk.

Questions during the physical introduction

- What is spirituality for you and which role does it play in your life?
- Would it be possible to bring more spirituality into society and if yes, how?

Questions structuring the talk

- Is spirituality something like a muscle that you can train or is it just given to you?
- How can we experience spirituality?
- Are we afraid of spirituality in our modern society or do we doubt how to combine rationality and spirituality?

Feedback Ana Vujanović

Role of moderator: structured talk with questions + physical introduction to give people time to think.



## General conclusions

In general the talks were nice and it seemed people really appreciated to exchange ideas and experiences. The level of the talks might not be 'world-changing' but people seemed to be really content with having the possibility to exchange. Nobody complained about the lack of discussion on the performance (with one exception).

Even though we are very happy with the opportunity the festival gives us, the *Tanztage* context is problematic since the talks are either very late or in between performances, causing half of the participants to leave as soon as the next performance starts. Besides that: most of the performances are premiers and then it is difficult to know which topic is fitting. Even though people didn't seem to mind to not talk about the performance, for us, offering these talks, there is a need to connect, at least a bit. Also because people didn't know what they were getting into. It might be better to communicate beforehand what the topic is about. Not so much because of negative responses, but maybe we could attract more participants.

It was good to experiment with the role of the moderator. Besides planning how to structure a talk and what you want out of it, it is necessary to define what kind of moderator you are, how you want to be: confrontational, pleasing, helping, guiding etc. You might need the right character even. The moderator plays an important role in the talk and its outcome.

The preparation of the talks was quite time consuming and complicated. You are in a way creating a new event, which is however connected with a performance not made by you. Therefore you feel a responsibility towards it, trying to avoid the possibility it doesn't match at all and participants feel the divide too harshly. Even though deciding on topics, based on the performances, was at first not that difficult (with one exception!), after closer examination it was not as easy. We realized how we take topics or subjects for granted at first. But when you think more in depth about them, it turns out you don't always know so much about it. We definitely felt the lack of knowledge. But we also realized if we consider everybody an expert on societal things since we live and deal with them, we should also consider ourselves like that. These talks were not so much about the conventional way of learning, but about exchanging and reconsidering your opinion and experience in a conversation with your peers.

It would be interesting what would happen if one offered this on a regular basis – maybe even not in the theatre space itself, but a reserved table in the foyer.