

Experience Report Residency (27.7. - 4.8.) & Symposium (4.8.) Nina Mühlemann

Future Clinic for Critical Care, Impulstanz Vienna

I attended a DanceWeb residency together with my artist colleagues Jeremy Wade, Tanja Erhart & Yoav Admoni, and together we subsequently organised a symposium on August 4th. This residency and symposium allowed us, a group of artists living in other parts of Europe (Zurich, London, Berlin) to closely connect to the Viennese artists we encountered and who were part of our symposium. My colleague Tanja Erhart and I both identify as disabled and have a great passion for disability arts and disability studies. In December 2017 I completed a PhD at King's College London in performance studies and disability studies, and in my thesis I examined the relationship between disability arts and the mainstream. Since then, I have moved more into a curatorial and artistic practitioner role, and the residency and symposium allowed me to make use of my skills and knowledge and to deepen them.

My colleague Tanja Erhart and I both have a strong interest in models of disability, different ways of theorising disability and organising the knowledge around disability. We believe that this theoretical knowledge provides great tools that can affect and shape artistic practice. This residency allowed us to delve further into this thinking and to have an exchange with Austrian disabled artists.

Impulstanz has a rich history of providing inclusive workshops and working with disabled dancers for decades. Unfortunately, this history is not very well known or documented, and so it was one of our main aims for the symposium on August 4th to discuss this history and give a platform to local pioneers who have been dancing and teaching dance at Impulstanz for decades. In particular we wanted to highlight the perspectives of disabled pioneers in the field like Vera Rosner, Cornelia Scheuer and Michael Turinsky, who were all part of the symposium. Other guests included the inclusive dance scholar Elisabeth Magdlener, the artists Julischka Stengele, Sonja Browne and Christian Polster, and the artist Katharina Senk who performed together with Tanja Erhart.

In the Future Clinic for Critical Care, a project I have been part of since the summer of 2018, we explore the topic of care through a socially engaged arts setting, and for the event of August 4th we did that through the institution of Impulstanz. In particular, we were interested for the August 4th event in how an institution of the future could become a space of care and that practices access in radical ways. The symposium itself included an extensive discussion round, a variety show, which I moderated, and an input from us which I discuss below.

As disabled artists, scholars and activists we were dismayed to realise that although Impulstanz has been programming inclusive dance workshops since the 1990s, there were several issues around access that we experienced personally and that were raised at the symposium or during the residency by others. As such, this symposium felt very important because it allowed disabled artists to voice their concerns and to map out what an institution of best practice could look like. A best practice of access would mean that disabled artists can focus on developing their artistic practices and engage creatively with the topics they are interested in, without having to discuss disabled toilets, changing rooms or access to outside events with the institution. These basic conversations around access prevent us from using and sharing the skills we were approached for in the first place, and they are very draining and require a lot of emotional labour. During the week we had at Impulstanz we tried to raise our concerns around access multiple times in discussions with the team, however to achieve a more substantial and sustainable impact we decided to also create an intervention for our symposium.

We created a list of access demands together with the disabled artists and scholars we worked with during the residency, which is attached below. Although this list of access demands is specific to Impulstanz, it is also of relevance to other cultural institutions and something we might develop further. We included performative sequences in the presentation of demands, which are omitted from the attached list. We have also extended the list with feedback we got during the symposium itself and in its aftermath.

Impulstanz Access Demands

- What does access mean to Impulstanz? Access does not simply refer to wheelchair access, but also includes access for neuro-diverse people, learning disabled folks, D/deaf and hearing impaired people, visually impaired people and chronically sick people. Recognise access in its fiercest manifestation as a practice that is anti-ableist, anti-racist, anti-classist, and queer as fuck
- We want Impulstanz to make disability present and sexy on the website, in the programme, in the flyers, the workshops and the festival

Programme

- Diverse programming throughout the whole period of the festival in workshops and performance.
- A Cutting edge symposium concerning disability arts and contemporary dance
- More accessible performances and events (access does not equal wheelchair access)
- Be transparent about what is accessible for whom with symbols and examples (for example: what event has audio description? Sign language? Wheelchair access? Relaxed performance? Simple language? Etc.)
- More performances and workshops by and with disabled artists, representing a wide range of disabilities and intersectionality
- Make children's events accessible (for disabled kids and/or disabled parents and caretakers)
- more accessible seating at performances
- online booking for accessible seating
- booking of accessible seating at the Tageskassa for all events

Workshops

- Advanced workshops for disabled people
- all workshops about inclusive practice need to be taught or co-taught by disabled people

- free workshops for teachers who want to make their practice more inclusive, taught/co-taught by disabled people
- all teacher training and workshops in accessible spaces

Accessible spaces

- Work with venues who make access a priority
- disabled toilet(s) with a hoist
- accessible showers
- accessible changing rooms
- accessible 'fast' changing rooms
- accessible water fountains
- accessible pool/cafe area
- enough accessible parking and clear information where to find accessible parking

Print and online materials

- Accessible website
- A list of accessible restaurants, cafes, bars etc. in the brochure
- Mark whether the listed venues etc. are accessible with clear symbols
- Offer large print materials or digital welcome packs
- offer materials in simple language

Awareness

- create a campaign around diversity and access that raises awareness across the whole festival for all visitors and participants
- create a curated space with books, reading materials and pop-up discussions about access, diversity and intersectionality

Team

- development of an access concept in September

- 2 designated access positions, regular meetings with all the teams (programme, workshops, artist hospitality, print material, website...) throughout the year to look at access (access is a shared responsibility of all staff)
- mandatory training for all staff members to gain a basic understanding of ableism and access

Money Money Money

- designated ring-fenced (zweckgebunden) budget for access
- No controllers for the pay as you wish workshops
- Make more workshops pay as you wish, not just inclusive ones