

Alliance of Inter national Production Houses

A model for
networked
cultural work
in the
performing
arts

Alliance of International Production Houses



Table of contents

2 Editorial

4 Official greeting Monika Grütters

6 Mission statement

8 Distributed intelligence Dirk Baecker

10 About production houses

**International production houses:
a reliable home for the independent
performing arts community**
Annemarie Matzke

**Strong production houses
strengthen our work**
Women artists from the independent
performing arts community in
conversation with Eva Behrendt

**Rethinking the city. A journey to
the seven associated production
houses**
Falk Schreiber

30 Individual alliance projects

FFT Düsseldorf
釈迦ヶ池 (Shakagaike) –
The Buddha-Pond
City as factory

HAU Hebbel am Ufer Berlin
Berlin bleibt! City, Art, Future
Houseclub

**HELLERAU – European Centre
for the Arts Dresden**
Erbstücke
Residency programme

Kampnagel Hamburg

Gender mainstreaming
– The subversive power of Pop
#1000taten for remembrance culture

Künstlerhaus Mousonturm Frankfurt am Main

Curating is producing. Associated
artists at Mousonturm
Creating productive communities

PACT Zollverein Essen

WerkStadt – Polyphonic slogans
IMPACT – Parliament of practices

tanzhaus nrw Düsseldorf

Interview with Claire Cunningham
Interview with Doris Uhlich and
Boris Kopeinig

60 Joint programmes

**Claiming Common Spaces
A programme series within
the alliance**

CCS I: Art and Urban Practice
CCS II: Art and Digital Life

**Academies
Ongoing training for the
independent performing arts
community**

Academy for Performing Arts Producers
Academy for Contemporary Theatre
Journalism
Academy for Arts and Encounters

Dear Reader,

We are delighted to present you this behind-the-scenes look at the multifaceted activities of the Alliance of International Production Houses. After almost five years of funding from the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media and a significant number of completed and ongoing projects, we are now submitting the first comprehensive documentation of our work both as an alliance and as seven independent contemporary performing arts houses. We invite you to learn more about our networked working methods from a number of different perspectives. Our original intention was to publish this booklet to mark the 3rd instalment of our annual "Claiming Common Spaces" festival, which would have taken place in 2020 at Kampnagel in Hamburg. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 crisis thwarted our plans and we had to postpone the event to 2021. In an era of pandemic-related restrictions, the fragility of the independent performing arts community has become even more apparent, which made us eager to reflect on this state of affairs; we therefore asked sociologist Dirk Baecker for a contribution, and he delivered an apt analysis of how vulnerability and distributed intelligence mutually determine and influence each other. Indeed, the crisis is particularly affecting the living and working conditions of independent creatives worldwide. We are addressing the impact of Covid-19 on the work of artists all over the globe in a number of formats at our houses as well as in our new "VOICES" blog on the alliance website.

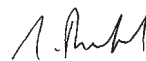
To help us answer the complex question of what exactly a "production house" is, we turned to Annemarie Matzke, an artist who has enjoyed a successful career in the production-house cosmos for years as a member of She She Pop. After that, journalist Eva Behrendt talks to five artists drawn from the independent arts community about how production houses provide space for working and performing while also acting as sites for encounter and exchange. Falk Schreiber then examines how the alliance's structure is influenced by

the myriad of ways in which each individual production house is embedded in their respective locations.

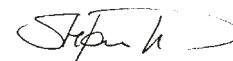
After that, we provide insight into the concrete work carried out by the alliance by exploring a number of groundbreaking projects. Each of our seven member production houses describes two exemplary and successful formats and/or productions that were created on-site in the context of the alliance. We then spotlight two projects initiated jointly by the seven alliance members: first, the comprehensive training and continuing education programmes designed to professionalise individuals active in the independent performing arts scene in the fields of production, journalism and social inclusion and, second, "Claiming Common Spaces," the abovementioned annual festival that explores today's most pressing questions, including "the right to the city", the transformation of life caused by digitalisation, cultures of coexistence, post-colonialism and the global climate crisis.

We would like to extend a special thank-you to Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media Monika Grütters for her continued support in making the ongoing work of the Alliance of International Production Houses possible.

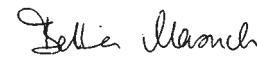
We hope this booklet sparks your curiosity and inspires you to attend a performance at one of the seven allied production houses in Berlin, Dresden, Düsseldorf, Essen, Frankfurt am Main and Hamburg either live or online.



Amelie Deuflhard
Kampnagel Hamburg



Stefan Hilterhaus
PACT Zollverein Essen



Bettina Masuch
tanzhaus nrw Düsseldorf



Matthias Pees
Künstlerhaus Mousonturm
Frankfurt am Main



Carena Schlewitt
HELLERAU – European
Centre for the Arts, Dresden



Kathrin Tiedemann
FFT Düsseldorf



Annemie Vanackere
HAU Hebbel am Ufer Berlin

Official greeting



Monika Grütters © Elke Jung-Wolff

Cicero once asked “What is a friend?” and his own response was the following: “A friend is, as it were, a second self”. In the figurative sense, an enriching and worthwhile friendship such as this – one that expands one’s own perspective and extends one’s own horizon and opportunities – is precisely the relationship seven of Germany’s most important production houses entered into when they formed the Alliance of International Production Houses. For the past five years, these bodies have worked together in an alliance that has since become a permanent fixture on the independent performing arts scene. The individual theatres, each of which differs from the other in terms of focus and local context, contribute their specific expertise and experience to the alliance in a fruitful way that allows them to have a broad impact extending far beyond their respective regions.

The declared objective of the alliance is to examine and react to socially relevant themes and disputes in an open, creative and sensitive manner. This approach generates a series of new spaces for encounters, where audiences, local and international artists gather to engage with one another – whether

on small or large stages – and to develop new content and new forms of theatre. The alliance continues to increase its wide appeal by means of joint programme policies, joint festivals and nationwide training programmes, including the new Academy for Arts and Encounters, which examines the arts as a site for cooperative social thinking and the exchange of ideas. For many of the participating artists, the alliance helps to open them up to new and larger audiences, in turn giving the seven production houses a wealth of new opportunities to collaborate with the vibrant independent arts community.

I am delighted that we have been able to provide support for this valuable collaboration over the past several years. In each of the two three-year funding periods since 2016, we contributed €12 million from my ministry’s cultural budget. This has led to the creation of trendsetting new ways of connecting cultural productions that have set new standards and received international acclaim. I am also delighted that the alliance is now supporting our NEUSTART KULTUR programme with its expertise and unique perspectives drawn from the independent performing arts scene. The Covid-19 pandemic is a global challenge that has once again shown us very clearly how precious, fruitful and also politically important cooperation among international artists really is.

I wish the Alliance of International Production Houses continued success, ever more inspiring artistic experiences and, in the spirit of Cicero, many new and rewarding friendships!

Professor Monika Grütters,
Member of the German Bundestag
Minister of State to the Federal Chancellor
Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media

Mission statement

The Alliance of International Production Houses is made up of seven of important work spaces and theatre venues for the independent performing arts in Germany. In contrast to state or city-funded theatres, the seven alliance members are production houses with no standing ensembles or fixed repertoires. Instead, they function as key anchors for the independent contemporary arts and theatre scene in their cities or regions. They also act as important partners for national and international co-productions and guest performances. The spectrum of artistic production at these independent houses ranges from contemporary theatre, dance and performance to music, cultural discourse and visual arts projects. Alliance members put on over 3,000 events each year to audiences totalling roughly 450,000.

The alliance was founded in 2015 with a number of key tasks, including the following: to enable and popularise contemporary visual and performing arts projects, to foster artistic and trans-disciplinary research projects exploring socially relevant issues, to anchor these projects effectively in urban society, to promote artistic production and presentation and to facilitate local, nationwide and international co-productions and tours of works arising from the independent scene. Each individual alliance member also plays the part of an important regional network

liaison to partners in the realms of culture, science, politics, economic and civil society.

The seven alliance members see themselves as broad-based and integrative bodies that foster a sense of community and a greater degree of diversity, participation, inclusion and sustainability. In a collective statement on non-discrimination issued in 2020, they committed themselves to implementing active and preventive measures designed to fight against all forms of discrimination. The alliance created the annual "Claiming Common Spaces" festival and three important career training instruments for the independent performing arts: the Academy for Performing Arts Producers, the Academy for Contemporary Theatre Journalism and the Academy for Arts and Encounters. The individual production houses each bring their key issues, working methods and approaches to the alliance, thereby establishing a new form of exchange and cross-institutional cooperation. Starting in 2016, thanks to a decision made by the German Bundestag, the alliance began receiving annual funding of €4 million from the office of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. This made it possible for the production houses to extend their network-based structure, their independent content and their public practices – and to make these visible throughout the country. The alliance sees itself as a pilot project for "transformative practices" of cooperation. On an international level, it is regarded as a role model for networked cultural work in the performing arts.

Distributed intelligence

Dirk Baecker

It was Frank Kirchner, a professor at the University of Bremen, who first came up with the brilliant idea back in the 1990s. In his attempt to get a scorpion robot to move more effectively, instead of equipping it with a brain capable of using all eight of its legs, he decided to give each of the eight legs its own brain. As soon as that was accomplished, he argued, everything else would be a mere question of evolutionary algorithms that permitted the legs to coordinate their movement among themselves. Each one of the legs would make a suggestion as to which direction to move in, and the other legs would decide whether to follow this suggestion or not. In a sense, one individual leg would act more or less randomly (mutation/variation), and each of the other legs would decide – based on the information at their disposal – whether or not it would be worth it to follow this random action (selection). If none of the legs disagreed, then the suggestion would have proven its validity (retention). Of course, the entire system would depend on whether the legs were able to process all the relevant information regarding the surrounding terrain, food intake, enemies and prey. And, of course, there's the scorpion's stinger, which always has its own ideas.

The seven production houses whose work is presented in this brochure follow a similar model of evolutionary distributed intelligence, each on its own terms. Whether they have eight legs – or more or fewer – is irrelevant at this point. Either way, it is obvious that they cooperate in precisely this effective manner together with artists, artist groups, sponsors, the community of project workers, technicians, intellectuals, scientists, audiences and cultural policymakers. At this point, I will leave it open as to who plays the role of the legs and who the role of the stinger.

The principle of distributed intelligence is well-known in the field of organisational research. A number of companies, and not just agile ones, already work this way, as do strategic departments at public authorities, churches, universities and armies. For example, General Stanley McChrystal undertook a strategy shift towards "Teams of Teams" in the US military in response to many unpleasant experiences in the Gulf Wars and Afghanistan. The focus in this case was on a network-based organisation rather than on the previous "silo" model. A network organisation does not work from the top down, but rather from inside to outside and from outside to inside. It remains in constant contact with a restless, unreliable, disruptive yet also indispensable and stimulating environment. It waits for suggestions, tasks, ideas, guidelines and restrictions and then proceeds to implement them. However, it doesn't implement them on a one-to-one basis – if it did, it would very quickly be doomed. Instead, it interprets and processes these impulses according to its own ideas and its own internal coordination process. Such an organisation cannot and should not be devised, managed and guided by heroically asserting a particular will. Instead, one does it by inspiring and monitoring the coordination process that takes place within the organisation as they confront and process the suggestions and disruptions coming from outside.

These days, one often gets the impression that 'inside' and 'outside' cannot be clearly distinguished from one another. And, in fact, it is very important to bring together artists, sponsors, the above-mentioned community of project workers and cultural policymakers and encourage them to get involved in the decision-making process here and there. It's

also just as important to send out one's own staff to participate in production processes that characterise the independent cultural scene. But even in the case of this highly productive environment of interaction and commotion, one still has to know whether one is outside or inside in each case. Indeed, the decision whether to walk left or right still has to be made. The very thing constantly at stake is one's own profile, which one needs in order to be at all interested in, and interesting to, artists, sponsors, audiences and cultural policymakers.

Of course, the scorpion model only half applies here. Indeed, in the case of the production houses, there is no genetically programmed organism that can provide a framework for the evolutionary algorithm determining the coordination between legs. This framework is something that must be created anew every day. It is the product of an independent intelligence coming into contact with the distributed intelligence. It is itself one of the legs, which means that it has to deal with all the other legs while also keeping an eye on its own profile. In contrast to the Scorpion, however, each of the legs is always on its own path. They are not obliged to play along if they do not wish to do so.

But they can if they want. Network theory stipulates that different participants coordinate not only among themselves, but also that they make sure to remain active on behalf of each other without losing themselves in the process. This is truly a tricky manoeuvre to master.

In the Covid-19 era, it's quite easy to see what this principle of distributed intelligence is rooted in, namely vulnerability. For the entire human race, vulnerability is just as much a fact as it is a metaphor. The production houses are able to succeed only because all their partners see themselves as vulnerable. They make their vulnerability available to each other. Why? Because it's the only way to ensure an ongoing exchange with the social, human and natural environment. One becomes robust when seeing oneself as being vulnerable. This vulnerability cannot be hid by laying claim to some sovereign reason that has everything under control. Through artistic research, performance and an often relentless process of self-observation, one exposes oneself to one's own vulnerability and thereby provides a spot-on reflection of the society in which we live.

Dirk Baecker teaches sociology at Witten/Herdecke University.



Scorpion, eight-legged walking robot for outdoor terrain designed by Prof. Dr. Frank Kirchner, head of the Robotics Innovation Center at DFKI in Bremen © Dieter Klein

— About — production houses

International production houses: a reliable home for the independent performing arts community

Annemarie Matzke

An ideal form of theatre, dance and performative-arts production would begin with an artistic idea. This idea would then form the basis for organising rehearsals, work contexts, work spaces and performances. From the very start, the team would have decided to work together and would also have the means to pay itself appropriately for its work. This work would involve a rehearsal phase that provided time and space for development, possibly spread out over a long period. It would include a rehearsal space equipped with everything necessary for the implementation of new ideas. It would involve a rehearsal schedule determined by the participants themselves – one that allowed them to balance the demands of their careers and family lives. Ideally, in the final days leading up to the premiere – at least in the final week – the participants would be able to rehearse on the stage itself, with a set that could remain in place for several days. The performance would then be presented often, not just at one location and not just at the national but also at the international level. Again, ideally, this approach to production would not be limited to one project, but rather create the foundation for a binding, long-term working environment.

This is precisely the approach to production to which production houses active in the

field of contemporary performative arts are committed. Indeed, even if they struggle regularly with the challenges of a precarious financial situation, they nevertheless offer a stage and a reliable home to the independent performing arts community.

In this sense, production houses differ tremendously from city and state theatres, at least in Germany, which have a permanent ensemble and a standard repertoire that aims to present a different performance every night. At the beginning of every season, these theatres come up with a schedule that usually focuses on the staging of dramatic texts. Directors are then invited to direct these performances and, together with the theatre management and dramaturgical team, they cast actors drawn from the ensemble to perform in each individual production. In such forms of work, rehearsal times are adjusted to fit the repertory schedule; for example, actors often rehearse one production in the morning and perform a different production that same evening. The repertory schedule also means that stage rehearsals are rare, and the stage constantly has to be set up and dismantled at a great technical and human cost.

Starting in the 1990s, in a number of German federal states and cities, a series of production houses were founded that enabled a different

way of producing theatre than was practiced at state theatres. This new approach also took into account the many regional differences present in each different location. It was a form of production that came as close to the above-mentioned ideal as possible and continues to do so to this day. These locations do not limit themselves to staging pre-determined productions; instead, they function as research sites for exploring the full breadth of performative arts. Whether it's Kampnagel in Hamburg, FFT in Düsseldorf, HAU in Berlin, Mousonturm in Frankfurt am Main, HELLERAU in Dresden, the dance-focussed tanzhaus nrw or the interdisciplinary work PACT Zollverein in Essen – all of these houses see themselves as experimental institutions that are situated regionally while nevertheless also being internationally networked, initiating universal discourses and providing an international context for the arts. For artists who work at and with these production houses, it means that they can develop their project ideas without having to abide by any pre-determined production context. Instead, they work together to develop a framework for each individual project. The production houses act as partners-in-production who foster the creative ideas of artists, no matter how unorthodox or difficult they may be to implement. In doing so, they focus on the artistic project itself, not on the necessity of putting on a show every night.

This approach allows production houses to point to changes taking place in the realm of the independent performing arts. In contrast to the first generation of "independent theatre", where artists were more likely to found their own theatre spaces, the production houses that are active today facilitate a division of labour: they function as partners in the concept development and application process; they enable projects by co-producing them; they provide rehearsal rooms, technical support, artist-in-residency research phases, spaces to showcase the projects and, finally, the PR to attract audiences. For

individuals and groups working in the independent performing arts scene, these are professional functions they would not be able to take on alone.

This kind of framework always already contains an international approach that not only fosters local artists, but also works to position their projects in an international context next to international co-productions and guest performances. Precisely because the production houses always take a cross-regional and international approach to their work, they are able to be effective partners for artists: they make it possible to present projects at different venues, to develop a network of co-producers and to generate much-needed national and international visibility. This international approach is justified, in particular, due to the fact that production houses are the norm in other European countries, such as the Benelux states and France. In contrast to state-theatre system dominant in Germany, people in those countries are quite used to the idea that productions are not tied or limited to one single location.

This approach to producing in the independent performing-arts scene has a political dimension, as well. A look back at the history of independent theatre shows that the freedom associated with these forms of representation lies especially in repeatedly questioning the nature and scope of performative arts, theatre and dance and how they emerge in the first place on both a social and aesthetic level. In this sense, theatre production itself is seen as a critical practice, particularly in exploring and critiquing its own structures. Indeed, even though the form and context of the work being done on the independent performing-arts scene is highly multifaceted, the one thing that characterises all artists and productions is the fact that they are working outside previously defined structures. The production houses enable and foster this way of working, but

they also co-initiate projects and help take them to the next level. The production houses are models of how to consistently work in cooperation with artists on new ways of producing art and on developing new and effective forms of cooperation, which include working with artists drawn from different sectors, creating new formats and contexts, experimenting with the relationship to audiences and engaging in international networks. In this sense, the approach to each institution and its practices is taken from the perspective of the arts, and thus is bound to change with each new project.

For artists, this approach to producing their work outside of established structures means one thing, in particular: autonomy. However, the fact that this autonomy comes at a high price becomes particularly obvious in times of crisis, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has led to the suspension of all forms of cultural life, the cancellation of festivals and guest performances and the closing of theatres with no concrete time horizon for their reopening. This negative side of the freedom offered by the structures of self-production can be seen in the precarious working conditions of the independent scene, particularly during the current crisis. Indeed, even though artists determine their own production schedules, their project-based work remains to a great extent uncertain. And, even though the production houses foster long-term cooperative relationships, the artistic work is nevertheless beholden to the timeframe of the projects; in other words, artists working on a project are paid only while they are working on the project. They are the first that can be set aside if money gets tight. When a theatre is forced to close, the project itself is called into question and threatens to become invisible. When production houses prevail in times of crisis, however, they offer independent artists a space where they can remain visible. They give artists the promise of a future. The questions raised by the Covid-19 crisis

are therefore the following: How should independent performing arts institutions be structured in order to remain as resilient as possible? What kind of funding is needed to be able to secure the otherwise precarious situation of artists? How can theatres move from a city-based or region-based approach and take on a more international posture? All of these questions will have to be answered in the coming months. And there are already a number of suggestions emerging from the production houses themselves; not only are they opening new platforms for the arts to take up an international perspective, which is more important now than ever before, they are also working to represent the interests of independent artists to a much greater extent. Our response to the current crisis cannot be that we give up our ideal approach to artistic production; instead, we must work to create long-term cooperation opportunities and security nets. Production houses are key partners to independent artists in this sphere, and this is shown by the fact that they give artists a reliable home – even in uncertain times.

Annemarie Matzke is a professor of experimental forms of contemporary theatre at Universität Hildesheim and a member of the performance collective She She Pop.



Annemarie Matzke © Daniel Kunzfeld



← Joana Tischkau, Playblack © Daniel Michael Shaw
↓ Gintersdorfer/Klaßen, The Ambassador © Knut Klaßen



Strong production houses strengthen our work

Nicoleta Esinencu, Monika Gintersdorfer, She She Pop, Meg Stuart and Joana Tischkau discuss the role production houses play in their art

Eva Behrendt

Our conversation takes place at a highly unusual moment in time. In mid-March 2020, all theatres and production houses were shuttered in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and all shows and presentations were cancelled. The independent artists I've brought together to discuss their relationship to production houses are all working digitally from their home offices.

There are many things that need to be re-negotiated and reorganised, first and foremost financial issues, including the following questions: Which organisers are going to pay for cancelled shows? Which organisers are not going to be able to pay due to their own financial situations? Which organisers are going to try to postpone shows to dates in the next season that might conflict with previously scheduled bookings? What about troupes who have members living in different countries? What can be done when a member's residence permit expires and they aren't allowed to enter the country? Are the groups' own resources going to be enough to compensate for their own losses and those of their employees? What can the production houses who work closely with artists and groups do to help?

To an even greater extent than ever before, the Covid-19 crisis has shown the precarious situation in which freelance artists and collectives often live and work. Established groups such as She She Pop, Gintersdorfer/Klaßen and Meg Stuart's Brussels-based company Damaged Goods function like small companies and are responsible for 10 to 20 employees each, some of whom are freelancers, others permanent employees. A number of these groups receive basic funding from the city or state, which covers their ongoing personnel and operating costs, but which does not enable any artistic production. In order to acquire funding for that kind of work, separate applications must be submitted, sometimes requiring submissions to 5 or 6 funding bodies for each individual project. At the same time, the groups are also expected to find coproduction partners and presentation opportunities. One of the only times they actually earn money is when they tour as part of a network, and this is where the Alliance of International Production Houses (BiP) plays an important role. In other words, when these guest performances are cancelled, the situation quickly becomes a threat to their very existence.



She She Pop, Kanon © Dorothea Tuch

However, the Corona crisis also shows the extent to which the BiP members, in particular, are dealing with the situation in a spirit of solidarity and in a manner that is as responsible as possible. "For example, HAU paid us right away and without any complications for the performances that were cancelled there," explains Fanni Halmburger from the She She Pop performance collective, which has been active for over 25 years. Their coproduction partners, including the FFT, have been very transparent in all decision-making, she noted. In the past several decades, She She Pop has joined with the production houses to engage in a number of structural battles, such as those for minimum thresholds for artists' fees. In addition to that, through their voluntary cultural-political work, they have passed on the know-how they acquired over those decades to the entire independent scene and brought these

themes to the attention of political decision makers time and again.

A shared history

The close working relationship between artists and production houses is usually the result of a shared history that brought them together at various stations over the course of the years. This relationship is shaped by curiosity, openness and a desire to engage in a long-term exchange of ideas about art and life. Monika Gintersdorfer, who gave up her directing career at public theatres early and today manages the two transnational groups Gintersdorfer/Klaßen (since 2005) and La Fleur (since 2016), tells of her first encounter with Kathrin Tiedemann, who was at Kampnagel Hamburg at the time, before going on to become artistic director of the FFT

Düsseldorf in 2004. Tiedemann raved about Gintersdorfer's urban events exploring the themes of flight, transport and the battle for resources: "For Kathrin, it was never about acquiring the perfect performance. She always saw the potential in the work and the big risk we were taking". Gintersdorfer also received a great deal of trust from the then head of the Sophiensaele in Berlin, Amelie Deuffhard, who just moved to Kampnagel, as well as from the dramaturge Aenne Quiñones (today at HAU Hebbel am Ufer), who was curating the Volksbühne's Prater Theatre in Berlin together with René Pollesch at the time.

Even prior to that, there was the festival known as reich & berühmt, which was held at the Podewil in Berlin and founded and managed by Carena Schlewitt (today at Dresden HELLERAU), Aenne Quiñones and Kathrin Tiedemann; they co-produced She She Pop's early show "Live!" at the end of the 1990s. As Fanni Halmburger notes today: "There was a certain generation of women who were interested in our art from the very beginning and who continue to support it to this day".

The Moldovan theatre director Nicoleta Esinencu operated her own indie stage and event venue in Chişinău, the "Teatru Spălătorie", for a number of years. In 2012, she met Aenne Quiñones at a theatre festival in Romania, which was followed by numerous other encounters and invitations. "The HAU empowers me to look at problems from my eastern European perspective", says Esinencu. "For example, the difficult relationship between western and eastern Europe. I have an honest and eye-to-eye relationship with the HAU, which I value very highly". Esinencu's partnership with HAU also resulted in other connections, for example, with the FFT Düsseldorf and HELLERAU, which co-produced her work. The choreographer Meg Stuart has worked with HAU's creative director Annemie

Vanackere since the beginning of her career in Belgium: "Annemie worked tirelessly to support my work from the very start, and she continues to do so today". This was also the case with Bettina Masuch, who brought Stuart to the Volksbühne in Berlin at the turn of the century and who today heads up the tanzhaus nrw in Düsseldorf. Over the course of the years since 1995, the Mousonturm in Frankfurt showed almost all of her early pieces and is a co-producer of Stuart's to this day. She also has a fifteen-year working relationship with PACT and Stefan Hilterhaus that involves several co-productions and an intense exchange. "Here, too, it's not about selling as many tickets as possible. It's about developing a shared vision of theatre. A truly contemporary theatre reflects the present through its artists. One could say it digests reality".

Repertoire

Many production houses regularly co-produce works by artists to whom they feel especially attached. Still, the production houses have limited budgets, particularly in comparison to ensemble and repertory theatres. Even the largest venue among the production houses does not have the means to finance productions to the full extent. Among the things they can offer artists are venue certifications, dramaturgical advice, co-production contributions, guest performance fees, tech assistance, a PR infrastructure and sometimes even rehearsal spaces. In the past few years, however, all members of the BiP have worked hard to present pieces drawn from the repertoires of their artists. In a system that was previously based on roughly 3 performances per house including subsequent tours, this is an immense step in the direction of artistic appreciation and sustainability.

Autonomy

Meg Stuart, Gintersdorfer/Klaßen and She She Pop were also often invited to work and perform at public theatres, sometimes in connection with special funding programmes associated with the German Federal Cultural Foundation. The Doppelpass fund, for example, was set up to effectively establish contacts and foster cooperation between ensemble theatres and independent groups. Fanni Halmburger, who worked with She She Pop both at the Schauspiel Stuttgart and the Münchner Kammerspiele, notes, however, that “although back then both Klaus Dörr in Stuttgart and Matthias Lilienthal in Munich were very familiar with our way of working, our cooperation failed in several different spheres. It started with the spaces themselves, and it also came up in regard to tours, which becomes incredibly complicated with the ensemble actors involved”. Indeed, the idea of collective work and having 7 directors on stage at the same time were aspects that could not be transferred to public theatres, where there is a clear division of labour, as one can see not least in their contracts: “We often have to share the director’s fee among the seven of us. The way public theatres think of the collective is more along the lines of one position per one person”.



↑ Meg Stuart, Hunter © Iris Janke

Residencies offered by production houses offer artists the opportunity to engage in autonomous work in relatively protected spaces. One example is the choreographer and Gießen graduate Joana Tischkau. She presented her performances at HAU and the Mousonturm, among others, where she developed her successful performance “PLAYBLACK” and also her new project “German Museum for Black Entertainment and Black Music” in the summer of 2020, together with Anta Helene Recke, Elisabeth Hampe and Freider Blume. For young directors like her, residencies are highly valuable opportunities to devote themselves to research and rehearsals without any pressure and with varying degrees of financial support. The best part about it is that “the results of the work are completely open”.

“Do what you like, it doesn’t have to be finished”, is exactly what Annemie Vanackere suggested to Meg Stuart in 2013, and then proceeded to make the entire HAU3 available to her for “Sketches/Notebook”. “For a long time, at public theatres, the focus was on having everything done in time for the premiere,” Stuart notes. “But for me, the process is just as important as the final product, so I truly appreciate the invitation to create something unfinished”.

Trust

Each individual artist is different. Each individual production house places the emphasis on different priorities. And each individual project has its own unique and often complicated funding parameters. This is why it’s difficult to reduce the relationship between artists and production houses to a single concept. If we have to settle on one element, however, then it would have to be trust. The trust that curious and enthusiastic curators continuously place in artists, and vice versa. It is also a mutual trust in the ability of



↑ Nicoleta Esinencu, Abolirea familiei / The Abolition of the Family © Dorothea Tuch

production houses and artists to meet “at eye level”, rather than as “bosses and executors”, as Nicoleta Esinencu describes it. “This trust contributed significantly to the fact that we exist as a group in the first place, and that we are able to continue doing this work”, says Monika Gintersdorfer. However, in addition to trust, artistic work under precarious conditions requires a degree of understanding for the realities of artists’ lives and working methods as well as an appropriate amount of structural solidarity among the production houses. Indeed, dramaturges and curators who enjoy longstanding working relationships have often become accomplices, as is the case with Nadine Jessen and Monika Gintersdorfer at Kampnagel. And Fanni Halmburger argues: “We’re conscious of where we’re from; we’ve changed and developed alongside each other. If we

still come up against the limits of the current funding system, the only viable solution is one that strengthens us all. With all of this in mind, there is no doubt that production houses have to be equipped and funded in a much stronger and more effective way. Only then can they continue to guarantee stability in the future as well”.

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Rethinking the city.

A journey to the seven associated production houses

Falk Schreiber

The creative work on display at Germany's independent production houses is mobile and multifaceted, which often makes it difficult to classify according to conventional genres, such as dance, drama, musical theatre and performance. In many cases, a project created at one production house will eventually move on to the next one. Anta Helena Recke's "The Insults of Humanity" is a perfect example of this: it was co-produced by the director together with the Kammerspiele in Munich, the Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in Frankfurt, the HAU Hebbel am Ufer in Berlin and the Kampnagel in Hamburg before being invited to the prominent Theatertreffen in 2020. Similar constellations can be found in numerous other works created in the independent scene, for example, by She She Pop, Gob Squad, Rimini Protokoll, andcompany&Co. and Gintersdorfer/Klaßen. The same applies to young artistic positions and "up-and-coming talent" as well as to international productions, such as those involving Lia Rodrigues and Toshiki Okada, Mette Ingvartsen and Eszter Salamon, Forced Entertainment, Nature Theater of Oklahoma and Kornél Mundruczó and Nicoleta Esinencu. Not only does this type of theatre cross aesthetic boundaries, it also transcends the borders between institutions, audiences, cities and nations.

Production houses are key producers and co-producers of these projects, but they

also function as long-term partners to the authors and artists behind them, both in terms of content and organisation. In 2015, the seven largest production houses in Germany came together to form the Alliance of International Production Houses BiP: in addition to the Mousonturm, HAU and Kampnagel, the alliance comprises Dresden's HELLERAU – European Centre for the Arts, Essen's PACT Zollverein and FFT and the tanzhaus nrw in Düsseldorf. These seven houses have seven distinct back stories and a multitude of different programmes, practices and aesthetics: "The goal of the alliance is not for us all to become the same!" emphasises Amelie Deuflhard, artistic director at Kampnagel. And yet the houses work very closely together and are driven by the shared goals of networking the community ever closer together and creating more professional employment opportunities, enhanced visibility and increased confidence on behalf of the independent dance, theatre and performance scene at the local, national and international level.

The shared activities of the BiP are not limited to joint productions and co-productions. The most important element in their collaboration is the fruitful exchange of ideas and experiences, whereby employees from all departments network with one another beyond their own regions. Independent artists, individuals involved in production and even local visitors and commu-

nities are invited to participate. The so-called academy programmes – which are developed by experts and carried out by the alliance – are just one example of this cooperation. Over the course of one year, the alliance offers ongoing education and further professionalization in different fields, such as the Academies for Performing Arts Producers, the Academies for Contemporary Theatre Journalism and the upcoming Academy for Arts and Encounters, which focuses on public relations expertise and solidarity-based cooperation.

The members of the alliance work together to identify subject areas and create projects that take an artistic approach to current political and social challenges, while also developing "transformative practices". For example, some of the projects exploring the politics of the body are the "Queer B-Cademy" founded by Daniel Chelminiak at Kampnagel, the Mette-Ingvartsen project "The Artificial Nature Series" 2017 at HAU and the think tank "Körper 2.0" at tanzhaus nrw. Numerous projects and programme series were also created in urban spaces under the motto "regional planning, in-between spaces, boundaries", including the "McDonalds Radio University" by Akira Takayama in Frankfurt, the "Superspaces" in Hamburg and "Solid Skills" in Essen. As part of HELLERAU's "89/19 – vorher, nachher" project, artists explored the theme of "democracy in crisis". These projects operate far beyond the conventional mode of producing and presenting. Indeed, their lab-like environments are developed in an artistic manner, with the artists and audiences engaging in a long-term exploration of new contexts, encounters and alternative scenarios of coexistence, while also conducting research and experimentation and creating entirely new networks in the process. Or, as Mousonturm artistic director Matthias Pees says: "We are world-city-labs".



PACT Zollverein © Dirk Rose

On the one hand, Katernberg is a poor district in the city of Essen built around a large industrial complex. On the other, however, it is also home to the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site known as the Zeche Zollverein, one of the most important tourist magnets in the region. In addition to museums and colleges, the former colliery site has also been home to the "Performing Arts Choreographisches Zentrum NRW Tanzlandschaft Ruhr" (PACT Zollverein) since 2002. The white tiles on the walls testify to the building's former function as a changing area for up to 3,000 miners. Today, in these visually striking spaces, artists and performers are working to unite art, technology and science under one roof, thereby creating a site of learning and research.

For founding director Stefan Hilterhaus, the focus at PACT Zollverein lies on the process of creating art and taking on experimental approaches. This encompasses dance, performance, symposia, concerts, over 100 international artist residencies annually, long-term alliances with artists, trans-disciplinary formats with several institutions and initiatives as well as close links to urban spaces. For example, in 2016, the house launched an exchange space by the name of "WerkStadt", which functions as a satellite and open project space in the middle of Katernberg. This is an approach that constantly seeks to rethink

the city as part of an ongoing inquiry into urban realities and a never-ending dialogue between scientists, local initiatives and art.

This approach is not unique to the PACT Zollverein in Essen. In fact, it can be identified in all of the production houses. “Basically, the alliance is structured like a research network”, explains Hilterhaus. This is also the reason why the alliance works so well at the local level, even though it is explicitly a nation-wide initiative. The production houses remain fully integrated in their respective environments. “You can’t compare Berlin-Kreuzberg, where the HAU is located, or the Ostend in Frankfurt, which is home to the Mousonturm, with Katernberg”, says Hilterhaus. “But the practices we engage in when approaching situations are transferable – and we’re constantly learning from each other”.

A young house like PACT has ideal conditions in which to function as freely as possible with open-ended results. The older, more established houses face a different challenge: Kampnagel, for example, has large halls, 6 stages and over 1,800 seats that need to be filled on a regular basis. But this also opens them up to new and experimental formats, such as a temporary hostel for refugee visitors, for example, or a blow-up Turkish steam bath for queer immigrant body culture. The HAU, on the other hand, fulfils a key function as an anchor for the large independent scene in Berlin. The tanzhaus nrw in Düsseldorf has been around for 40 years and carries its mission statement in its name; as a site of contemporary dance, it pursues an approach that is unique in the entire country, namely to combine its stage programme and artistic production with comprehensive and diverse cultural education offerings. “We differ from the other production houses, which work across artistic disciplines”, explains artistic director Bettina Masuch. “We focus on the genre that takes the human body as its starting point”.



tanzhaus nrw © Katja Illner

At the tanzhaus nrw, there is a palpable openness to the breaking of genres, such as when they explore the boundaries of conventional ideas of dance or when robotics and AI are used to push these ideas into virtual reality, for example, in the work of Doris Uhlich. Or when unusual body images – *real bodies* – become visible in dance beyond the “fit, young and beautiful”, for example in the work of Jan Martens and, more recently, Claire Cunningham. Street jazz and urban dance classes for amateurs of all ages also take place under the same roof. Indeed, the unique profile of tanzhaus nrw comprises productions and performances created by regional and international dance professionals side-by-side with courses, workshops and professional dance training for all generations. The Junges Tanzhaus for kids and young adults works closely with 10 schools in Düsseldorf to develop productions for young audiences – for example, with choreographers such as Alfredo Zinola – and to create space for a young company at the house.

The Forum Freies Theater, or FFT for short, was founded in 1999 and is another member of the alliance from Düsseldorf. In the strict sense, these two theatres are not in competition: “We see each other as artistic accomplices”, says Masuch. FFT artistic

director Kathrin Tiedemann confirms this approach: “We complement each other and cooperate, for example, in creating offers for young audiences and participants”. In the coming year, a number of additional prospects for further cooperation will open up when the FFT moves to Düsseldorf’s central train station neighbourhood. Tiedemann, who has headed up the FFT since 2004, considers the FFT to have a specific connection to the city, and her theatre sees itself explicitly as part of the public space, laying claim to the urban environment as a *common space*. She also conceives the digital space as an extension of the FFT’s artistic collaborations, which can also be seen in its longstanding cooperation with the theatre-gaming collective known as machina eX, which involves experts and colleagues getting together on a regular basis in Düsseldorf to develop new hardware and software hacks.



FFT Kammerspiele © Clara Marx-Zakowski

“People often identify the FFT with art and activism”, notes Tiedemann. “That is, with current political themes, experimental formats, performances in the public sphere, discursive series”. For example, the series “Future Politics” was developed in cooperation with political scientists Oliver Marchart and Alexander Karschnia from andcompany&Co. As part of this series, international activists, theorists and artists

discuss strategies of re-democratisation in the face of growing right-wing populism worldwide. Post-colonial perspectives also prevail on the FFT programme, with works by directors such as Laila Soliman, Claudia Bosse, Monika Gintersdorfer and Lukas Matthaai.



HAU Hebbel am Ufer (HAU2) © Jürgen Fehrmann

HAU artistic director Annemie Vanackere is used to the cooperative approach, previously working as artistic co-director of a large, multifaceted production house that organised international festivals in the Netherlands. She is also responsible for the suggestion to name the Alliance of International Production Houses an “alliance”: “We gain more when we work together than if we see each other as competitors”. Cooperation is most definitely key, argues Vanackere: “We don’t create our programme in a vacuum; instead, we design it in exchange with artists and partners in the city, and we design it for audiences who are thoroughly knowledgeable and critical. Here in Berlin, where we have highly international and artistically high-brow spectators, we’re inevitably going to have experts sitting in the audience. This is very special, a constant welcome challenge. We’re very lucky!”

HAU Hebbel am Ufer was created in 2003 out of the fusion of the Hebbel Theater

(an internationally oriented theatre founded in 1988), the Theater am Halleschen Ufer (which housed Peter Stein's Schaubühne in the 1970s and later presented Berlin-based independent choreographers) and the Theater am Ufer in today's HAU3. Since Vanackere became artistic director, the HAU has featured an increasing number of revivals in its programme schedule, thereby establishing a kind of repertory of contemporary arts, which includes, for example, Gob Squad, She She Pop, Rimini Protokoll and Meg Stuart: "This provides the artists with a broader audience and a better financial base, and in turn fosters the creation of new works". In addition, themes such as feminism, intersectionality, social power structures, the German-German relationship and East-West relations are deepened and consolidated in key thematic areas with international artistic positions and at interdisciplinary festivals. A particular focus in this area lies on collaboration with artists from eastern and central Europe.

Even though the individual production houses might differ with regard to their practical implementation, there is a definite kinship in terms of their clear and cosmopolitan political posture. In 2018, the production houses played a key leadership role in creating the "Declaration of the Many". In 2020, the alliance also issued a "Commitment to Non-Discrimination". In return HELLERAU in Dresden for example regularly comes under fire from the right-wing political party AfD. Amelie Deuflhard even had a criminal complaint lodged against her "Ecofavela Lampedusa Nord" at Kampnagel, for which right-wingers accused her of misusing cultural funding.

Kampnagel has traditionally seen itself as a political house that bears an historical imprint of civil disobedience and plurality, so to speak. Founded as an ironworks in 1865, the factory complex in the north of Hamburg has seen many different uses

since it was built. After being decommissioned as an industrial production site, it was used for a short time as a stage by the Schauspielhaus. In 1982, the independent theatre scene discovered the site, setting up the Festival "Besetzungsproben": after subsequently actually occupying the site, they were given permission to stay permanently. The fact that the focus of the work being done at Kampnagel continues to be on dance and performance, and sometimes on the interface of music and visual arts, does not in any way contradict the site's political agenda – on the contrary. Power-critical perspectives on society, culture and politics remain its core of the artistic themes, festivals and discourse formats. The focus is on European colonial history just as much as on today's European migration policies. They also explore institutional racism, queer heterotopias, feminism, access for artists with disabilities, the dialogue between generations and climate change, which is seen as being closely connected to the global shift to the right.



Kampnagel © Antonia Zennaro

But it's not only in Hamburg and Dresden that right-wing populists and production houses have come to blows time and again. For example, at the behest of the AfD, Frankfurt's Mousonturm was obliged to submit a full financial report every year to the Hessian parliament. On the one hand,

this is due to its current programme, which, like many of the other houses, takes a critical approach to contemporary political and social themes as well as post-colonial and anti-discriminatory issues with such titles as "Displacements", "impossible bodies" and "Unfuck my Future".



Künstlerhaus Mousonturm © Jörg Baumann

Frankfurt is a unique city in this regard, argues Matthias Pees, head of the Mousonturm since 2013. On the one hand, it is the banking capital of Germany, a trade-show capital, a business capital, home to skyscrapers and a longstanding centre of migration and transit. On the other hand, it is also a metropolis of the artistic and intellectual avant-garde, the city of Horkheimer and Adorno, of Heiner Goebbels and Hans-Thies Lehmann, William Forsythe and the Ensemble Modern. The Künstlerhaus, which is located in the eight-storey Mousonturm was founded in 1988, initially as a venue for the local independent scene and the S.O.A.P. dance company. At the turn of the century, and after the end of the "Theater am Turm" there, it also emerged as a house for international productions. Thanks to the avant-garde tradition in the city and the region, Pees regularly encounters open-minded spectators: "Audiences here simply have a very stronger rooting in contemporary art."

One fruit of these cooperative roots in the avant-garde is the Frankfurt LAB, which offers groups and artists-in-residence "space and time for contemporary production and open-ended artistic processes" at five partner institutions. For the Mousonturm, the LAB is thus a second venue for rehearsing and performing. But Pees also has his eye on more middle-class spectators as potential audiences for his programme; for this reason, the Mousonturm cooperates also with the Alte Oper, the Archaeological Museum, the Schauspiel Frankfurt and the Hessisches Staatsballett in Darmstadt and Wiesbaden. Strategies like these serve to open up new and interesting cooperative activities and are pursued by all of the production houses: at Kampnagel, for example, the list of collaborations ranges from the Kunstverein and the Deichtorhallen to the Gängeviertel and the Elbphilharmonie.

An equally important feature of the work being done at all of the production houses is their ongoing collaboration with associated artists. On the one hand, these artists come from their respective local scenes; on the other hand, they are also drawn from international communities. Among the artists associated with the Mousonturm for many years are Jetse Batelaan, Eisa Jocson, Dieudonné Niangouna, Mats Staub and Akira Takayama, who creates site-based events, such as the "McDonald's Radio University". PACT, too, has a long tradition of cooperation with artists and companies, such as Meg Stuart / Damaged Goods, Forced Entertainment and the Cullberg Ballett. In addition to the names already mentioned above, HAU also works with and-company&Co., Jefta van Dinther, Oliver Zahn, Kat Válastur, Nicoleta Esinencu and Ligia Lewis. Lewis is also a member of the "Factory Artists 2018/19" at tanzhaus nrw alongside Choy Ka Fai and Claire Cunningham.

Still, how do these projects, which were created explicitly for Berlin, function at other

locations such as Frankfurt, Dresden or Essen? Such questions have become prevalent amid cooperating alliance members. "Beyond the mere exchange of projects, we also engage in a transfer of work practices between the houses", notes Pees. "We build on each other's experiences, and that leads to a higher level of professionalism in our work as production houses as well as on the independent scene in general. We've started to compare our practices, and we also discuss why they're sometimes different and why they should remain so in the future. What specific characteristics do we each have? What do we have in common? Where are we headed? And where are we coming from".

Of all the international production houses, the history of the HELLERAU goes the furthest back. The festival hall was built in 1911 in the garden city known as Hellerau as an "educational institution for rhythmic gymnastics" based on a design by Heinrich Tessenow. The idea here was to connect the arts, education and business. Later on, the festival hall was used by the police, the Waffen SS and the Red Army, and only after the fall of the Berlin Wall did it regain its function as a cultural centre. Since 2004, HELLERAU has been a "European Centre of the Arts" and now an international production house headed by Carena Schlewitt, who took up her position in 2018. Unlike the other houses in the alliance, it is not an urban location; although the festival hall lies at the edge of Dresden and is well-connected to the inner city, the famous Dresden Heath starts in its immediate vicinity.

For Schlewitt, this partial isolation is not a disadvantage: "People make a more conscious decision to come to the site". Artists in residence also praise the typical HELLERAU atmosphere between pure artistic focus and *community place*. The venue's peripheral location is reflected thematically in the

sense that Schlewitt also explores such subjects as the urban-countryside relationship, sustainability, ecological development and climate change. HELLERAU's programme also focuses on eastern Europe by fostering new working relationships with the independent artist scene in Poland, Czech Republic, Russia and Hungary. Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the history of the East-West social transformation is still present here. HELLERAU takes up this subject in a conscious manner, works on new perspectives and cultivates an exchange with the comparatively young regional independent scene and many other partners in the city. Yet another unique selling point is the legacy of the Centre for Contemporary Music, which continues to operate in the 21st century, fostering all kinds of musical trends, interdisciplinary practices and digital formats. In a city such as Dresden, which must seek out its identity somewhere between the Baroque and the Modern eras, the notions of heritage and tradition carry a lot of weight. By fostering the contemporary arts, HELLERAU explores this heritage and tradition, thereby constantly rethinking its own home.



HELLERAU – European Centre for the Arts © Stephan Floss

In the course of my journey to the individual venues and in my discussions with their artistic directors, I slowly saw a pattern emerging according to which the Alliance

of International Production Houses would appear to operate. Each house is closely interwoven with its environment and the city it calls home, and each house works to rethink the city in fresh new ways. Of course, their environments are all different and unique. But the experiences that they gather in these environments – and by which they allow themselves to be transformed artistically – are highly comparable. In this sense, the alliance represents a kind of unity in diversity. Just as each city differs from the other in terms of individuality and structure, the element that forms the basis of the work being done at the production houses is the principle or construct of a "city". In turn, this concept becomes the object of artistic inquiry. Herein lies that crucial yet simple factor that is otherwise so difficult to create and maintain, especially in ongoing communications with one another: "The cooperative activities of the alliance are exhilarating because we truly take the time to engage in a deeper and ongoing exchange on particular themes and approaches", says HELLERAU's artistic director Schlewitt.

Falk Schreiber is a Hamburg-based writer. He is a member of several theatre-related juries and a regular contributor on performing and figurative arts for *Theater heute*, *nachtkritik*, *Tanz*, *Hamburger Abendblatt* and *die taz*.

Individual alliance projects

In addition to carrying out their own established programmes and practices, the seven allied production houses also regularly join forces to realise unique and often multi-year artistic projects at their respective locations. These projects explore and experiment with a number of key themes, such as the economic, social, cultural and ecological transformation of cities, the future of society, theatre, dance and art and various different scenarios of human coexistence. The seven institutions also pool their expertise to foster the ongoing development of advanced production methods in the realm of performative art, all the while endeavouring to expand their already extensive local and international networks.

The alliance's decentralised cooperative model makes it possible to refine and promote established practices, such as artist residencies, commissioned works, co-productions and site-specific project developments. This model also enables the seven allied theatres to collaborate with one another in strengthening, communicating and publicising artistic positions and local contexts at the national and international level.

On the following pages, each of the seven members of the alliance presents two individual productions, performances or artist-in-residency programmes as examples of how they make use of the instruments available to them as part of the alliance.

FFT Düsseldorf 釈迦ヶ池 (Shakagaike) – The Buddha-Pond



Jun Tsutsui, 釈迦ヶ池 (Shakagaike) – The Buddha-Pond © Christian Herrmann

As part of its “Nippon Performance Nights” series, the FFT in Düsseldorf has regularly showcased contemporary works from Japan and/or by Japanese artists living in Europe since 2013. At the request of FFT, Jun Tsutsui, an author, director and head of the Osaka-based group known as Dracom, created a multilingual piece featuring a German and a Japanese actor called

“釈迦ヶ池 (Shakagaike) – The Buddha Pond”. This German-Japanese co-production was developed in Osaka and Düsseldorf and performed for the first time in 2019 in Düsseldorf and Kyoto. Here, Jun Tsutsui talks about how he used a real diplomatic incident as the starting point for his examination of cultural differences.

The title of my piece is the name of a body of water in the city of Suita in the prefecture of Osaka. In 1880, it was the site of the “Shakagaike hunting incident”. At the time, 17-year-old Prince Heinrich of Prussia was visiting Japan and went duck hunting in disguise at the Buddha Pond, where hunting was strictly prohibited. Unfortunately for him, the inhabitants of Suita caught him breaking the rules and proceeded to beat him up, fully unaware of his imperial parentage. The result was a diplomatic conflict between Germany and Japan, which was ultimately resolved when the Japanese government issued a unilateral apology.

Japanese people are always apologising, even when they haven’t done anything wrong. Germans, on the other hand, are very unwilling to say sorry voluntarily. Using this observation as a starting point, I suggested this topic to the FFT when I was in Düsseldorf doing research in 2018. Even though the “Shakagaike Incident” took place way back in 1880, communication mishaps and misunderstandings are still a very important issue for us today. On the one hand, access to foreign languages and cultures across the globe has been made easier by the internet and the use of advanced translation tools; on the other hand, however, interpersonal communication has become even more complicated.

As far as I’m concerned, social networks are the reason for this increasing difficulty. These networks are easy-to-use tools, but precisely for that reason, when differences of opinion and other conflicts arise, people are too quick to write their thoughts down and hurl their ideas at other people online. We click on “send” without considering how our own voice might spread and what influence it might have.

The protagonists in my play, the two actresses playing the two parts, are a German woman and a Japanese woman. Although both speak exclusively in their mother tongues, they still try to communicate with one another. For that reason,

surtitles are displayed in the form of stage objects, thereby playing an important role not only for the audience but also for the actresses.

Surtitles usually serve to make the content of a performance understandable to those members of the audience who do not understand the language being spoken on stage. We interweave this function and the question “What role do surtitles play for the actresses themselves?” with the presentation itself. When surtitles are present, we indeed have the feeling that we’ve understood our interlocutor, but it remains unclear as to whether this is truly the case. With the help of surtitles, I explore a situation in which it only appears that two people have understood each other. Now and then, there are passages that intentionally have no surtitles. This leads to a sense of irritation among people who only speak one of the two languages; it is this irritation, those moments of “not understanding”, that are especially important to me.

The “Shakagaike Incident” occurred because the people involved were not able to communicate with one another. My hope is that the members of the audience who speak only one of the two languages will be able to empathise with the sense of impatience that resulted from the impossibility of communicating and making oneself understood.

Jun Tsutsui

This text is drawn from an interview with Jun Tsutsui in *Doitsu Newsdigest*, Nr. 1105, www.newsdigest.de

Curators: Akiko Okamoto, Kathrin Tiedemann

FFT Düsseldorf

City as factory

Research and event series

We are currently investigating the dynamics of contemporary urban development processes as part of a multi-year, interdisciplinary study project under the title “City as Factory”. The starting point for the project is a former post office located near Düsseldorf Central Station. This post office is scheduled to be the FFT’s new home, and along with the Düsseldorf Central Library and the Theatre Museum, among others, we are set to move into our new premises in early 2021. The site is located in the direct vicinity of the tanzhaus nrw and the Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf, and the overall idea behind our move is to join our new neighbours in helping to transform the train station area – known to date as an “arrival city” and a hotspot for social conflict – into a vibrant cultural district.

In June 2018, as part of an initial three-day programme focus, we examined the redevelopment of the area around the Düsseldorf central train station as an example of the reconfiguration of our cities. We also explored the issue of how master plans and logistics – the third strongest economic sector in Germany – are changing life in the city. Sergio Bologna, a logistics expert and a leading proponent of the Italian political theory of “operaismo”, analysed the logistical interplay of eCommerce, supply chains and digital infrastructures as a driving force behind global capitalism. Chicago-based architect Clare Lyster examined how urban logistics are revolutionising everyday urban life through a new and innovative space-time regime. One excursion took participants to the end of the “New Silk Route” in

Duisburg-Rheinhausen and to the “Bridge of Solidarity” commemorating the workers’ strike against the closing of the Krupp iron and steel works in 1987/88. Christoph Schäfer and Renée Tribble presented “PlanBude Hamburg”, one of the most exciting examples of contemporary participatory processes in the realm of urban development, which we then discussed together with residents, urbanists, artists and activists.

In 2019, we continued the programme with a series of lectures, discussions and city tours. We started with an event titled “City in capitalism” featuring urban geographer Bernd Belina and cultural geographer Helmut Schneider. We subsequently explored the connections between city, theatre and public places as part of a three-day symposium under the title “The public sphere as prey” together with theatre experts Ulrike Haß and Sebastian Kirsch. And, finally, in December 2019, in a lecture and discussion titled “Movement in the neoliberal city”, political scientist Margit Mayer spoke about the political action spaces available in urban society in view of the ever-increasing power of investors.

We will be continuing our “City as factory” series in 2020 with a research project by Christoph Twickel, who met with several stakeholders involved in the redevelopment of Düsseldorf’s train-station area to find out how urban planning works in the “Investor City”.

Project team: Jochen Becker, Jan Lemitz,
Klaus Ronneberger, Kathrin Tiedemann



A guided tour to the former main post office in Düsseldorf as part of “City as factory”, 2018 © Clara Marx-Zakowski

HAU Hebbel am Ufer Berlin

Berlin bleibt! City, Art, Future

The 'future of cities' is an important issue not only in Berlin. In fact, it is one of the biggest questions we face at the moment, and as with all great questions, the only way to tackle it successfully is in a group. Therefore, the AIPH chose this question as one of its key focal points: after Claiming Common Spaces I in 2018 in Berlin, Claiming Common Spaces II in 2019 in Düsseldorf and "Detroit – Berlin. One Circle" in May 2018 at HAU, the festival titled "Berlin bleibt! City, Art, Future" marked a further step in the examination of this urgent issue. The festival launched the season opening on 26 September and ran until 5 October 2019.

What are our visions for the cities of the future? The things that contribute to a high quality of life in urban areas go far beyond just affordable housing and include transport policies and the design of public spaces, cultural infrastructure and social spaces. The work of artists is essential in this context, as they use art to provide the public with information, to encourage people to reflect on pressing issues, to showcase utopian designs and engender a positive force that counteracts the feeling of powerlessness that often arises in the face of developments on international financial and speculative markets that are solely interested in maximizing returns.

Before the Berlin Wall fell, Kreuzberg was a West-Berlin district shaped by immigrant residents and an alternative lifestyle. It used to be students, anarchists and punks living in a neighbourhood with artists and

musicians. Today, the district is increasingly also home to Yuppies, startups and investors, which means that there is less and less space for the original inhabitants. Kreuzberg is also home to HAU Hebbel am Ufer, and we work here together with artists and residents to open our houses to the public, to urban society and to voices often unheard amid the din of prevailing power discourses.

Urban planning and investment are particularly visible in areas such as Kreuzberg, where there is still plenty of space that has yet to be subjected to urban marketing. The many changes taking place also mean that we still have the opportunity to shape the future and reflect on how we want to organise urban communities going forward. The range of issues is so closely linked with the everyday lives of people here that it's no coincidence that art and activism often meet.

In order to generate space for creative city designs in both a symbolic and a concrete sense, we transformed the former post office across from HAU2 into a temporary project space for urban action. In cooperation with artists, various initiatives and other guests, we activated the empty building for ten days by means of installations, city tours, interactive and participatory events,

discussions and concerts. We also thematised the preservation of everyday urban and cultural spaces. To mark the end of the festival, we held a big neighbourhood party featuring workshops, music, food and dance.

In order to create an ideal framework in which to discuss different approaches and points of view, we organised an "all-request" night where concrete models for the design of a compassionate form of urban life were presented and discussed together with prominent politicians and activists using HAU's direct neighbourhood as an example. How can we set a better course for the future in a way that will have a positive impact on urban life?

Programme team HAU: Ricardo Carmona, Aenne Quiñones, Sarah Reimann, Tobias Schurig, Margarita Tsomou, Annemie Vanackere;
Team HAU to connect: Stella Konstantinou, Jann Petersen, Volkan Türeli



A "Berlin bleibt!" urban action project space © Dorothea Tuch

HAU Hebbel am Ufer Berlin

Houseclub

Ever since it first launched in 2011, Houseclub has been a meeting place and a space for artistic discussion, exploration and experimentation by and for young people. From the very beginning, we've had a close partnership with the neighbouring Hector-Peterson-Schule and since 2018 with the "culture class" at the Fritz-Karsen-Schule in Britz. With the support of the BiP, we were able to intensify our work and establish a more permanent footing for our collaboration.

In residencies lasting several weeks, local and international artists develop interdisciplinary artistic projects together with the young adults as part of their regular school courses. The results of these activities are then presented as part of HAU Hebbel am Ufer's regular programme schedule. Making use of contemporary theatre, performance and dance, the participants work together to develop their interests and playing rules. The aim is to elaborate in play and experimentation – together with artists – a way to question and delve into existing realities, explore everyday political issues and expand familiar languages and modes of expression through art. This approach gives each and every participant the opportunity to bring in a different perspective and open up new areas of action.

Of course, this collective work isn't always free of conflict and contradiction. But it's precisely these clashes that provide both the engine and the seal of quality for our work. When different interests and expectations come up against each other, we seek to make productive use of the conflict in artistic ways. One of Houseclub's

goals is to generate something productive from out of the opposites that emerge from these encounters. At Houseclub, we seek to shed light on the things that arise when we take this unrest seriously and let it evolve, while also looking at the specific obstacles and dissenting opinions everyone feels they're confronted with.

It's not always easy to navigate and endure obstacles and discord. For this reason, throughout our entire programme schedule, we try to illuminate these contradictions rather than attempting to resolve them too quickly. In our opinion, it's never too early to learn and practice this kind of approach. The HAU Houseclub offers a space for experimentation, where both the imagination and the resistance-to-imagination are given their due. "What is, cannot be true", wrote Ernst Bloch, with regard to the space of utopia opened by the imagination. There is no doubt that this space can generate perspectives on the future and other forms of lifestyle-design. The idea is to get the young students to perceive the theatre in their neighbourhood as an institution that is there for them, in particular, as a place where they can and should get involved. And vice versa, we also want to have a positive influence on a part of their everyday live at school.

One example of our work is "You were here, now we're here!" Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, students from three Berlin districts joined with artists Annett Gröschner, Luise Meier, Maximilian Feldmann, Elie Gregory, Florian Keller and the Club Real and KGI collectives (who themselves were still at school or in apprenticeships



L.A.Müller, It's a battlefield, baby! © L.A.Müller / Benjamin Krieg

back in 1989) to explore and discuss aspects of the fall of the Wall and the stories associated with that major historical event. In the course of researching the project, participants met with witnesses of that period and also depicted their own personal life realities in the form of a photo project. They presented their contemporary perspectives in dialogue with human, plant and object witnesses in works at the intersection of performance and installation. "You were here, now we're here!" was part of the festival titled "Comrades, I Am Not Ashamed of My

Communist Past", in cooperation with the state programme Kulturagenten für kreative Schulen Berlin, the Kurt-Tucholsky-Oberschule, the Fritz-Karsen-Schule and the Hector-Peterson-Schule.

Among the artists who've worked with teenagers at the Houseclub over the years are Nuray Demir / Tümay Kiliçel, Nicoleta Esinencu, Josep Caballero Garcia, Bogdan Georgescu, L.A.Müller, Ayse Orhon, Franziska Seeborg, Pink Valley, Litó Walkey and many more.

Team HAU to connect: Stella Konstantinou, Jann Petersen, Volkan Türeli

HELLERAU – European Centre for the Arts Dresden

Erbstücke

Some people would argue that Dresdners have a compulsive need to “commemorate”. And it certainly is true that Dresden is one of those cities that celebrate their historical legacy to an intensive degree. And for every effusive commemorative celebration and minutely detailed architectural reconstruction there are inevitably also extensive accompanying debates, pro and contra demonstrations and satirical art events. But Dresden is by no means in danger of drowning in some sort of obsession with the past. On the contrary, the city thrives on its vibrant discussions relating to the themes of heritage and tradition.

HELLERAU – European Centre for the Arts is housed in the Festspielhaus, a listed memorial and a “cathedral of modernism”. For this reason, the centre finds itself in a never-ending realm of conflicting priorities between the past, present and future. What exactly is the heritage we are invoking and why? Who defines what can and cannot be considered “representative”?

These questions continue to have an impact on our work in the contemporary arts. Every year, under the title “Erbstücke” (Heirlooms), we bring together international artists who have dedicated themselves to radically dynamic concepts of commemoration and heritage and who generate their work based on diverse reactions and interferences. Here we describe three projects that explore these questions.

In the 2019 instalment of the Erbstücke festival, Polish artists Agata Siniarska and Karolina Grzywnowicz planted a mini-forest on the stone portico of our Festspielhaus.

Against this backdrop, their HELLERAU-coproduced performance “Second Nature” dealt with the legacy of the Polish-Jewish dancer Pola Nireńska and the great trauma of the Holocaust. Each one of the plants they used had some sort of relationship to violence, for example, as a camouflage for mass graves or as deliverers of poison. The artists asked visitors to reflect upon the function of art and beauty in a cruel world, and they found an utterly coherent answer in the surreal yet intimate togetherness experienced by the visitors in the artificial mulch landscape. Individuals who shared this experience are sensitised in a unique manner and hardly look at the present world the same again.

Chinese artists Xiao Ke and Zi Han pursue a different movement in their long-term project “Chiname”, also co-produced by HELLERAU, this time for Erbstücke 2020. The project is dedicated primarily to global and postcolonial interrelations. The artists conducted hundreds of interviews in which they asked their worldwide respondents a seemingly simple question: What does “Chinese” mean to them? The video installation slowly reveals the fiction of a unified popular identity (not just of Chinese people) and a “true” historiography as an exercise of political power. In doing so, the installation also allows for a comprehensive view of the power apparatus of “identity politics”. It takes up a post-colonial perspective, while also posing questions with regard to multiple identities in general.

Yet another HELLERAU co-production as part of Erbstücke 2020 is “Dance in the



Agata Siniarska and Karolina Grzywnowicz, Second Nature © Peter R. Fiebig

GDR: What remains?” by Sašam Asentić & Collaborators. In this piece, Asentić takes a look back at the dance culture of a society that no longer exists and examines together with his international team – made up of artists from a variety of post-socialist countries – how these dance practices and artist designs hold up today. Which historical trends are worth being remembered and which aren’t? And how are socio-economic transformations reflected in artistic memory? Asentić’s piece enables us to examine power relations and reality structures, while also revealing the traces of bygone social systems and the stories of how they became blurred over the years.

The two productions associated with the 2020 Erbstücke Festival mentioned here were rescheduled to the 2021/22 season due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

André Schallenberg, Programme Director Theatre and Dance, HELLERAU

HELLERAU – European Centre for the Arts Dresden

Residency programme

Our residency programme is made possible thanks to funds from the Alliance of International Production Houses. We offer artists the opportunity to perform research, further intensify their working methods and also develop projects in a focused manner. Artists are given an apartment, a work studio and a large garden area in which to rehearse and experiment. In addition, the artists engage in networking with each other and the regional community. The focus of this international programme is on fostering artists and groups active in the realm of contemporary dance, theatre, performance, music and media art. The artists then open up the interim results of their work for discussion and sometime present it as part of the larger HELLERAU schedule. Here, three artists report on their work in our residency programme.

Ida Toninato (Canada), music: "The idea of travelling far away from home and being able to focus entirely on one particular project takes on a very 'true' meaning at HELLERAU. Before leaving Montreal, I felt slightly overwhelmed by an endless to-do list, meetings, rehearsals and performances. I thought about how nice it would be to just concentrate and work. And now I feel like the universe might have actually really heard me on that point! My time at HELLERAU, far away from that fast-paced life, combined with the shows that we get to see here – it's the perfect combination when you really want to achieving something".

Mary Gelman (Russia), documentary photography: "I'm working on a new project

titled 'Acts of Acceptance of the Body'. I took photos of women, couples and families in Moscow and St. Petersburg who had experienced discrimination in Russia on account of their weight. My goal during my residency at HELLERAU is to take the project one step further and use the medium of video to connect three themes: the acceptance of bodies, the culture of shame and the influence of eating cultures. The project is not designed to follow any specific guideline; instead, it's more of a kind of invitation to foster a different way of dealing with the body".

Boglárka Börcsök (Hungary), performance/video: "My work processes emerge from personal encounters, observations, emotional connections and the practices of watching and listening. I carry out extensive research and enter into long-term artistic projects that deal with hidden stories, forgotten artists, abandoned spaces and invisible power narratives, while also questioning aesthetic hierarchies and exploring methods of embodying bodies, choreography, documentation and fiction".

In addition to project- and partner residencies, HELLERAU also offers residencies focusing on specific key topics:

Artist-in-Garden Residence / Environment: Artistic work is increasingly focusing on issues relating to the future of the planet Earth and the relationship of human beings to the environment. At the moment, five artists are working on related themes as part of project residencies at HELLERAU. Sound artist Chelsea Leventhal is developing a multiple-channel electro-acoustic



Ollie © Mary Gelman

location-specific sound installation; Romuald Krężel, René Alejandro Huari Mateus and Magdalena Weniger have set up a speculative climate lab in a greenhouse; and Bence György Pálkás has taken the moral dilemma of plant and animal extinction as the basis for a new theatre piece.

Hybrid Residence: At the beginning of the 20th century, in a project that marked a collaboration between industry, research and art, the HELLERAU Gartenstadt and Festspielhaus were created as a response to ongoing industrialisation and fundamental changes in living and working conditions. In the era of digital transformation, HELLERAU continues to provide a platform for artistic research and experimentation,

Hybrid, in collaboration with Ars Electronica, ZKM Karlsruhe and MUTEK, among others. For example, in 2020, Óscar Escudero and Belinsh Moreno-Gil are the *Hybrid* artists-in-residence and are currently developing a multi-media performance project that critically examines digital evaluation tools and systems.

Rosa Müller, Assistant Residency programme
HELLERAU

Kampnagel Hamburg

Gender mainstreaming – The subversive power of Pop



Rosana Cade, Walking: Holding © Rosie Healey

Queer-feminist discourse is often accused of being elitist, somewhat querulous and even irrelevant to a large part of society. But what's at stake here is nothing more and

nothing less than gender equality and self-determination, the reclamation of the history of marginalisation and marginalised people, and the achievement of equal

rights for all individuals on all social levels. "Queerness" as a philosophy, political agenda, freedom-based future concept and a collective term used to describe the gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, inter, asexual and * community did not always suffer from an academic-elitist image: the Pop icons of the late 1970s and 1980s, including David Bowie, Annie Lennox and Grace Jones, celebrated "queerness" long before the term had even caught on, inhabiting it as a form of pop-cultural practice.

As a large institution with considerable mainstream reach, Kampnagel regularly infiltrates the larger stages, feuilletons and theatre-audience conversations with themes drawn from activist thinking spaces. From 7 to 10 March 2019, Kampnagel engaged in Gender Mainstreaming in an attempt to dislodge queer-feminist discourse from its niche and make it suitable for use in everyday life. Prior to every show, all newcomers and queer-beginners were invited to gain new insights, for example as to why a person does not need to be homosexual in order to describe themselves as queer, why the series of letters that started with LGBT is getting longer and longer, why that's not a bad thing and what exactly is meant by the word gender. After this brief input, the visitors then went to watch the shows.

Lucy McCormick, for example, made it clear how easy it is to "queer" ostensibly self-explanatory social conventions with the help of comedy and Pop in her emancipatory-queer-feminist reading of the life of Jesus. The verb "to queer" is used to describe a popular strategy in which conventions are looked at from new perspectives, that is, disturbed from inside or re-interpreted in new and radical ways. Rosana Cade's intervention "Walking: Holding" took place in the public sphere and invited visitors to gain new perspectives by literally walking hand-in-hand with strangers through the city, where they were themselves subjected to the gaze of others; it was an impressive experiment and an

effective call for empathy and a change in perspective. The highly popular, three-day feminist-anti-racist tattoo convention "Ink about It" held in the west foyer was yet another gateway to entirely different social contexts. As part of the show MDLSX, Motus interwove Jeffrey Eugenides' novel "Middlesex" with significant theoretical works drawn from the queer universe: Judith Butler, Donna Haraway and Paul B. Preciado were made accessible in this visually and emotionally powerful show, and the many enthusiastic public reactions spoke for themselves.

Gender Mainstreaming at Kampnagel provided an artistic and discursive space to the boundary-blasting potential of feminism and queerness, all in the service of clearing up misunderstandings and tackling fundamental issues. The progress achieved by researchers and activists as far back as 1968 and up to our present day continues to inspire, but also to provoke backlash. This defensive position is understood as part of a new cultural power struggle in which "gender opponents" try to somehow maintain the binary world with its outdated and supposedly "biological" characteristics.

The fact that we still have a long way to go in this battle can be seen in keywords such as #metoo, the "Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community", the so-called prostitution protection law and paragraph 219a of the German Criminal Code. The manner in which we choose to approach the question of sexual rights and gender self-determination in the 21st century has become a global issue; and this provides a great reason to make sure that the creative transfer of knowledge is a core task of cultural institutions and thereby to firmly establish this practice at Kampnagel.

Alina Buchberger, Nadine Jessen, Uta Lambertz
Dramaturgy Kampnagel

Kampnagel Hamburg

#1000taten for remembrance culture

The 2019/20 season at Kampnagel was held under the title “#1000taten” and focused on a practical inquiry into so-called “remembrance culture”, that is, the manner in which individuals and societies deal with their own history. Especially against the backdrop of the instrumentalisation of “remembrance culture” by right-wing forces, the importance of engaging in a deeper social discourse about our collective memory becomes apparent.

Just as important as gathering information on German colonial history, for example, is situating that historical material in the continuity of German history past (national socialism) and present (structural racism) and then translating this knowledge into practical solidarity – that is, into action. With #1000taten, we break through the one-sided canon of knowledge by means of aesthetic, activist and theoretical formats and with the help of prominent national and international discourse producers, whom we invite to join us in Hamburg. We are also in the process of expanding our networks with Hamburg-based initiatives and international artists whose work is dedicated to the question of decolonisation in politics and aesthetics. The hashtag #1000taten was used as a reference throughout the entire season.

For example, productions such as “Herero_Nama” by Nuran David Calis, “Maji Maji Flava” by Flinn Works and Asedeva and “Is This A Human?” by kainkollektiv, Zora Snake and Njara Rasolomanana took an artistic approach to repressed colonial history

and the violent consequences that persist to this day. At the same time, these plays also infiltrated the larger German theatre scene and its audiences, thereby bringing remembrance-culture discourses out of an activist-based environment and straight into the often privileged milieu of conventional theatre-goers. Other pieces, such as Anta Helena Recke’s “The Distortions of Humanity” and Franck Edmond Yao’s “Sandwich Syndrom” are powerful discursive performative works that reveal the persistent coloniality in our present day and make it possible for audiences to have an aesthetic experience of this dynamic.

Among the discourse formats closely linked with these artistic works under the #1000taten umbrella were the lecture “Back to the Future – On the restitution of African Cultural Assets” by Bénédicte Savoy and the “Institutional Racism” lecture series, which invited experts from different institutions in Germany to shed light on racist and discriminatory structures in such areas as the police, the justice system, the educational system, housing, theatre and medicine.

The three-day focus “We Mokhtalefs” merged art and discourse via a number of articles to create a performative magazine. The book’s different chapters deal with repressed discourses on a queer Islam so as to give Muslim traditions a queer and trans*positive potential, while also critically examining the Western-dominated version of history in relation to Islam.



Anta Helena Recke, *The Distortions of Humanity* © Gabriela Neeb

The practical implementation of these discourses in the sense of #1000taten came to fruition, for example, in the process of the Solidarity Institution. This concept follows the example of those “Solidarity Cities” that decided to extend state guidelines and develop their own strategies to give all inhabitants equal access to social, economic and political processes as well as to cultural, financial and spatial resources. The goal was to gather and expand our knowledge on how to overcome administrative obstacles when working with international, diasporic and illegalised artists, so that cultural institutions in Germany could be able to stand beside them in solidarity. In this context, the transnational action-space known as “Migrantpolitan” played a

very specific role: as a self-governed community centre for refugees, by refugees and with refugees, it was a site of cultural self-determination and diasporic and hybrid aesthetics. The ultimate goal was to develop strategies of self-empowerment and decolonisation as well as self-determined forms of community life, celebration and artistic practice.

Alina Buchberger, Nadine Jessen, Dramaturgy
Kampnagel

Curating is producing Associated artists at Mousonturm



Eisa Jocson, Princess © Jörg Baumann

The Alliance of International Production Houses makes it possible for the Mousonturm to engage in long-term working relationships with associated artists and groups active on the local and international independent performing arts scene and also to

make long-term production commitments. In addition to rehearsals and presentations, artists also have the opportunity to take part in residencies and research stays where the results can be more open-ended. Mousonturm is able to provide comprehensive

dramaturgical, technical and organisational support with regard to rehearsals and the selection of topics and materials, as well as for the marketing and distribution of the works. Local issues and communities are often actively involved in artistic processes here.

In addition to roughly 13 associated artists and groups from Frankfurt (Swoosh Lieu, Fabrice Mazliah, Kötter/Seidl, Paula Rosolen/Haptic Hide, Antony Rizzi and the Bad Habits, Joana Tischkau, Susanne Zaun & Marion Schneider/Zaungäste, Billinger & Schulz, Janna Pinsker & Wicki Bernhardt, Oliver Augst, Mobile Albania, Les Trucs, YRD. Works), Mousonturm is currently working together with five associated artists not based in Germany. Since 2014, the Japanese theatre artist Akira Takayama has been developing special formats in public spaces throughout Frankfurt and the Rhine-Main area ("Evacuate Frankfurt", "McDonald's Radio University", "Wagner Project", "Hölderlin Heterotopia"); each of these projects draws on local communities and "heterotopie" locations just as much as on digital and participatory strategies.

The Congolese author, director and actor Dieudonné Niangouna has been at the centre of the multi-year project "Afropean Mimicry & Mockery in Theatre, Performance & Visual Arts" since 2014. The project also produced a book "Alliances. Critical practice at white institutions". The Mousonturm is Niangouna's only German partner, and we regularly coproduce and present his latest pieces. Since 2012, a number of long-term projects by the Swiss artist Mats Staub got their start at the Mousonturm, including "21 - Memories of Growing Up", "Ten Most Important Events in My Life" and "Death and Birth in My Life". Since 2016, we've also enjoyed a strong partnership with the Dutch children's theatre "revolutionary" Jetse Batelaan, head of the Theater Artemis in 's-Hertogenbosch, with the Mousonturm showing and coproducing several works created by Batelaan.

The fifth in the group is Philippine choreographer Eisa Jocson, a specialist for popular movement cultures and the recipient of the 2019 HUGO BOSS ASIA ART Award for Emerging Asian Artists. The Mousonturm has been producing and marketing her pieces and accompanying them on tour since 2017. This collaboration marks a radical break from the otherwise common rhythm of coproducing international artists, because it is not limited to financial support and guest performances. At the same time, this way of producing fundamentally changes the way we think and work at the Mousonturm, seeing as Frankfurt and Manila have become equal-level sites of operation.

Our relationship to Jocson developed continuously over time. After her first guest performances in 2013, she participated in the "The Greatest Show on Earth" circus spectacle as a Snow White impersonator and thereafter developed "Princess", a full-length dance duo about Philippine dancers hired to work at Disneyland in Hong Kong, where they are permitted to appear only in supporting roles due to the colour of their skin. As the appropriate professional structures are non-existent in Manila, the Mousonturm took over responsibility for the production. Our partner houses in the alliance, tanzhaus nrw and PACT Zollverein, also showed the piece. While "Princess" went on tour worldwide, Jocson was already in Manila working on "Your Highness", her new piece with five classically trained ballet dancers which will be produced once again by Mousonturm, this time in close cooperation with Ballet Philippines. Another important co-producer was Kampnagel. For Eisa Jocson, the ongoing cooperation with the Mousonturm is a great advantage: "It feels like home".

Team Mousonturm with the collaboration of Martin Baasch, Nele Beinborn, Teresa Bernauer, Caroline Brendel, Marcus Droß, Tatsuki Hayashi, Anne Kleiner, Elisa Liepsch, Matthias Pees, Juliane Raschel, Leander Ripchinsky, Carsten Schrauff, Joana Tischkau, Julian Warner and many more.

Künstlerhaus Mousonturm Frankfurt am Main

Creating productive communities

The “hybridisation” of established city-funded repertory theatres with the independent theatre scene is continuously moving forward. The Mousonturm, Kampnagel and HAU have long functioned as (co)-producers of several “independent” works that are now among the top contenders for invitations to Berlin’s prominent annual Theatertreffen, which was considered until very recently to be a stronghold of traditional, German-speaking repertory and ensemble theatres and therefore entirely resistant to works from the “off” or independent scene. In many locations, the government-funded city theatres and state theatres have even also made efforts to open themselves up to freelance independent artists and collectives.

In Frankfurt in 2016, it was possible to come to an agreement within the framework of the Alliance of International Production Houses on a long-term collaboration between Mousonturm and the repertory theatre known as Schauspiel Frankfurt. As a result, every year since 2018, a new production from an international independent ensemble has been co-commissioned, co-realised and co-presented in 10 performances each at the Bockenheimer Depot, the secondary stage of Frankfurt’s official city theatre. The first production was “Out of Order” by Tim Etchells and Forced Entertainment, a large-scale clown-play in which the British performance pioneer went on a hunt for the meaning of coexistence without saying a word. Forced

Entertainment, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm and Schauspiel Frankfurt were co-producers of the work, while two further alliance houses and long-term partners of Forced Entertainment – PACT Zollverein Essen and HAU Hebbel am Ufer Berlin – co-produced the play.

The second new production to come out of the collaboration between Mousonturm and Schauspiel Frankfurt, “Chinchilla Arsehole, eyey” by Helgard Haug and Rimini Protokoll, premiered at the Bockenheimer Depot in 2019 and went on to receive an invitation to the 2020 Berlin Theatertreffen as one of the year’s ten best. In this piece, Haug and the composer and musician Barbara Morgenstern work with three “everyday life experts” who suffer from Tourette Syndrome: graphic artist Christian Hempel, social worker Benjamin Jürgens and Hessian member of parliament Bijan Kaffenberger (SPD). Their appearances and stories thematise and reveal the basic assumptions and conventions involved in theatre performances. The next joint production at the depot will come in January 2021 with the premiere of “Burt Turrigo. An Opera” by the New York-based group Nature Theater of Oklahoma, featuring a ghost ship that finds nowhere to drop anchor after the climate catastrophe.

A unique feature of these joint co-productions by Mousonturm, Schauspiel Frankfurt and the individual groups is the complete independence of the emerging pieces from the ensemble and schedule of



Helgard Haug / Rimini Protokoll, Chinchilla Arsehole, eyey © Robert Schittko

city-sponsored theatres. None of the actors in the Schauspiel Frankfurt ensemble participate (as it would severely complicate the ability to tour at a later date) and the subsequent marketing of the piece is the sole responsibility of the group; this means that all potential profits from any guest performances flow directly to the makers of the piece. Although the stage sets for the productions are built in workshops belonging to the city-funded theatres in Frankfurt, the artists are nevertheless able to take the sets with them after the Frankfurt en-suite performance series and continue to use them for themselves.

The results of this collaboration are independent productions that are liberated in every respect and in the “sole” possession of the artists, who nevertheless benefit from established city-theatre apparatuses

and production house structures. The artists can take particular advantage of content-related support, organisational support, technical equipment and an over one-month uninterrupted final rehearsal period using the original stage set at the Bockenheimer Depot leading up to the premiere – these give artists an invaluable advantage.

Team Mousonturm and Schauspiel Frankfurt:
Marcus Droß, Katja Herlemann, Katrin Jaeger,
Anne Kleiner, Christina Lutz, Matthias Pees,
Anna Wagner, Anselm Weber and many more.

PACT Zollverein Essen

WerkStadt

Open the door and listen. 3 slogans from the work on the project "Polyphonic slogans"

The WerkStadt was opened in 2017 in Essen-Katernberg and is a public meeting-place, a plenum for the district and a lab for unusual and everyday practices. It is a sounding board for area residents and for artistic projects and urban-society development at the interface between art, technology and science.

Slogan 1: The city has to charm me as I try to charm it, but for now we are to a certain extent still strangers to each other.

In early 2019, PACT invited me to carry out a project in the WerkStadt as part of the "Solid Skills" exhibition. The theme was resilience, and the idea was to create an "archive of everyday practices of resistance". In the spring, I spent a lot of time in the WerkStadt simply listening. The door was always opening, people were always coming through, neighbours were organising gatherings, and kids were taking part in play groups. Women were rushing past, and the girls were always busy with something important. Sometimes they told me about what they were doing. Sitting on the windowsill, we talked about Katernberg and Instagram. I took walks through the neighbourhood, for example with project manager Benjamin Melzer. My recording device was usually off, at the request of my interlocutors, but after many conversations, I had learned a lot. The only way a project can take place here is in cooperation with the various neighbourhood stakeholders, but these people usually don't

want to appear in the projects. The way to achieve this sense of being "together" in artistic terms is a big challenge that calls not only for solid concepts but also for tangible practices.

Slogan 2: Breathe under water, swim in the air. My dream is to be a good mother and to found a label.

I approach the theme of resilience from a feminist perspective. I want to confront the idea of individual resilience with a polyphony of resilience slogans. With the help of a questionnaire, we attempt to document the tricks, knowledge, anger and experience of women and girls in the district. From those questionnaires we generate catchphrases that are then reinforced as a choir that can be heard in the entire district. In the form of these polyphonic slogans, their everyday lives and practical knowledge leaves the home and takes to the streets. A project like this can only unfold over the course of time and space and at a location that doesn't impose any mandatory presentational structure, that is, where the organisational framework can arise spontaneously. The WerkStadt allows us to share time and stories. The political aspect of the project is found not only in the content and the form, but also in the manner of encounter, the way we cooperate and search for common ground. The WerkStadt is an open space that is woven into the district's micro-local connections.



A glimpse into the WerkStadt © Dirk Rose

At the same time, it's also a bridge between PACT Zollverein and the neighbourhood.

Slogan 3: My network is small but well-grounded. We are all crazy, and we love each other for who we are.

At the WerkStadt, we don't shut off the outside world in order to explore an issue. On the contrary, we literally open the door to everything that happens outside. These things burst in and race through. It's sometimes unusual and entertaining, sometimes chaotic and exhausting – just like our society itself. "Polyphonic slogans make you stronger in the city" – the WerkStadt makes it possible to see and feel the city as a space in which my perspective is valid and where I can have an impact. This is where the door is opened, and after that, the moments shared

might result a project or maybe just a summer evening together at Katernberger Markt. The WerkStadt enables practices involving different participants, including me, the WerkStadt team and the women and girls of Katernberg; we all have different lyrics, but perhaps share the same melody.

Katharina Pelosi
Pelosi's "Polyphonic slogans" was created as part of the "Solid Skills" exhibition (2019) at the WerkStadt in cooperation with women and girls from Essen-Katernberg, the composer Julia Klomfaß and the graphic artist Tanja van de Loo. Drawing on the audio installation set up in the city space, Pelosi created the radio play "Parole V – A Feminist Reinforcement" for WDR Broadcasting.

Project team "Solid Skills": Clarisse Akouala, Pascal Bovée, Stefan Hilterhaus, Lenio Kaklea, Benjamin Melzer, Katharina Pelosi, Barbara Raes, Caroline Wolter

PACT Zollverein Essen

IMPACT – Parliament of Practices

Since 2004, PACT has brought together leading figures active in the realms of art, technology and science for an annual trans-disciplinary symposium called "IMPACT". These experts join with roughly 30 selected international participants to discuss a key theme in a series of workshops, lectures and other formats. In recent years, the subjects addressed at IMPACT have included ecological, digital and post-colonial issues as well as activist practices, digital trans-action and interaction spaces, artistic research and processes of collaboration. Among the experts who've contributed to the event are RYBN.ORG, CHIM↑POM, Dana Caspersen, Forensic Architecture, Jaya Klara Brekke, Paul Feigelfeld and Ingrid LaFleur.

The set-up of an IMPACT symposium is easily described: it is a series of three lectures on three consecutive days, focusing on a common theme. Each of them is followed by an intense discussion with a select group of participants. These participants have to apply to participate, as again is usual in a symposium. This discussion is usually followed in the evening by a performance or a lecture by the lecturer that is also open to the general public.

Contrary to an ordinary symposium however, the participants not only come from all over the globe, but also have very different backgrounds in art, research, architecture, or activism or any combination of those. They are not specialists, but still do have to express a specific interest in the

theme(s) of the symposium when applying. They also share quite some time together, as PACT is far removed from other venues, and there is hardly spare time between the worksessions.

That makes all the difference. One should compare an IMPACT symposium rather to endeavours such as a "Citizens Parliament" than with a regular symposium. A citizens parliament brings around the table people from different backgrounds to tackle issues that leave ordinary politicians clueless. They are assisted by specialists who can elucidate the parliament's members on complex technical issues without offering answers, because a policy never is or can be a purely technical matter but always involves a vision.

The results one has seen so far in countries as different as Ireland or the German speaking part of Belgium show that the outcome of such talks can offer proposals that go far beyond, and prove to be much "wiser" than was to be expected. The reason probably lies in the fact that the participants are not "specialists", but become nonetheless deeply committed to the debate because they sense that it can make a difference.

Just think what it would mean if such a parliament would be populated by persons who have a deep interest in the issues at stake even before the debate opens, and you get some idea of an IMPACT symposium. During the two editions I followed, the participants rarely shared the same insights or beliefs but what they obviously did share was a longing to gain more



IMPACT 16 © Dirk Rose

knowledge about the issues at stake. They all wanted to make a progress in their own line of work, drawing on what they learned during the symposium.

As a consequence, the lectures that form the basis of the symposium are often only the start of frantic discussions, which even critically examine the insights of invited "specialists". They often go on long after the scheduled hour. As another consequence, these symposiums create a strong bond between the participants. It is often lasting and occasionally even gives way to new collaborations or sparks off new initiatives and discussions in a different part of the world. That is quite something, for a meeting that only lasts three days or so ...

Pieter T'Jonck

T'Jonck is an architect and freelance journalist focussed on Performing Arts, Architecture and Urban Development. He publishes in international and Belgian media such as *De Standaard*, *De Morgen*, etcetera or A+. He has been accompanying IMPACT as an author since 2017.

Conception and management of the project:
Juliane Beck, Stefan Hilterhaus

"I bring the audience into my time".

Claire Cunningham talks with Jak Soroka

Claire Cunningham's work as a dancer and choreographer is characterised by an exploration of her own physicality – and her crutches. In making use of the crutches and expanding on their original purpose, she creates her own radius of action. From 2017 to 2019, Cunningham joined Choy Ka Fai and Ligia Lewis as the three tanzhaus nrw "Factory Artists", part of an artist-in-residence programme made possible by the Alliance of International Production Houses. Her solo piece "Guide Gods" was shown in November 2018 in a church and at a vocational college in Düsseldorf.

I would like to talk to you about your crutch tools and how you see your crutch sensitivity.

Crip is a word that has been re-appropriated, or reclaimed, by a number of disabled people in terms of quite a political relationship to identity. It's about the acknowledgment of a cultural identity relating to disability, one that values and prizes the qualities of life that being disabled offers. It was a word that I really struggled with for a long time. My relationship to disability and my acknowledgment of it, and then owning it as an identity, has been a gradual journey throughout my life. As an artist, in recent years, I've become really aware of what my crutch tools

might be in life. And I'm beginning to understand that what I'm interested in is the phenomenology of disability, that is, how I perceive the world because of being disabled, as opposed to how I'm perceived as being disabled. For example, I noticed that I have a really honed sense of attention towards the ground because I walk with crutches. I'm walking with four legs, and I really notice gradient, slipperiness and camber. This knowledge manifests as a tool when I work as an artist. People without disabilities often have an inability to read disabled bodies, to recognise when something is difficult or not. What people often perceive as struggle is actually just effort, and those things are very different. Struggle has a narrative and a projection of difficulty, and effort is just that it requires energy, and that doesn't mean it's necessarily a negative thing. Reading this as effort implies a form of suffering, as opposed to it being about energy and technique.

There's a moment in your piece "Guide Gods" where you're moving down the big altar steps and you're holding the tea tray, and there's just a beautiful way that you hook your foot under each crutch to move it down a step. You're obviously playing with audience expectation and what we expect you are able to do.



Claire Cunningham, Guide Gods © Brian Hartley

It was a very conscious choice. Tea cups and saucers are the physical material used within the space, and they project fragility. I've developed my own technique of how I carry stuff when I use crutches, and it might be quite slow, but it's actually very, very skilful. One of the reasons for doing this is to drop into what I call "crip time". This is a term that comes from the crutch community; it shifts the relationship to normative definitions of time, and this shifting into a time frame is absolutely about the time I need to move that is slower. It takes

a long time to bring these cups down. So I'm purposely making people have to wait, and I play with the awkwardness of watching – the thing you're not supposed to do if you're doing an 'entertaining show'. In "Guide Gods" I purposefully shift the speed in which my body works. I bring the audience into my time, my speed.

These are excerpts from a series of interviews for the tanzhaus nrw anniversary journal available online at "Guide Gods Digital Collection".

Curators: Mijke Harmsen, Anaïs Emilia Rödel (†)

"These days, everyone is stuck in a tank".

Choreographer and performer Doris Uhlich and media artist Boris Kopeinig talk to creative director Bettina Masuch about their performance "TANK" at tanzhaus nrw

The solo performance "TANK" is dedicated to the theme of "Body 2.0" and the social dimensions of self-optimisation. Doris Uhlich and Boris Kopeinig came up with the concept for the performance that became a tanzhaus nrw co-production and had its premiere there on 14 March 2019 as part of the "HI, ROBOT! Man Machine Festival".

In your work "TANK", you take a look at the future. What kind of man-machine connection does Doris Uhlich the choreographer dream of?

Doris Uhlich I dream of hyper-real machines that can strengthen my body, such as an exoskeleton that makes it possible for me to jump far without having to train in advance. On the one hand, I wish I could perform naked in a desert without getting a sunburn because my skin has somehow been made resistant to the sun. On the other hand, there is a certain quality in getting tired and getting older.

There are two main camps when it comes to the subject of "human enhancement": the utopians and the dystopians. Where do you see opportunities and dangers in the realm of technological development?

Doris Uhlich It's probably going to take a while before a robot or a machine can operate as complexly as a human. At the most, I can imagine a hand prosthesis, for example, being able to achieve fine motor skills. But the question remains as to what extent they can help to take things in on a sensory level. At the moment, I'm thinking a lot about the fact that machines don't get tired. The dancing robotic arm will never sweat or stink. But I would tend to prefer stinking! I don't want to end up taking nano-tablets that make my sweat smell like Clementine oranges or green tea. I think it's great that Doris is still capable of stinking.

A lot of the ideas people have about technology come from science-fiction films, a genre that has no doubt inspired your work.

Boris Kopeinig At some point in the course of our research, the image of the tank from the film "Alien: Resurrection" came up. That was really attractive to us, because the film deals with biotech and, at least in an abstract way, bodies in laboratories and bodies as sites of experimentation. Our set designers discovered that there was a whole series of comic covers in the 1950s

that depicted women in such tanks. The interesting thing is that these ideas are always about getting something wild under control, that is, the tank is a site where wild and dangerous life-forms are isolated, imprisoned and examined. This brings up the question as to whether we can understand the tank perhaps as a metaphor for the bubbles in which we all move on a daily basis, for example in the various forms of social media. The tank is see-through, but it's still an enclosed space.

Doris Uhlich These days, everyone is stuck in a tank. For me, the tank is representative of a limited space that influences me – but one that I also influence in return. The limitation makes certain movements possible and renders other movements impossible. The tank represents technology, but it also stands for a variety of ideologies. If you leave the tank, you simply enter the next one. There is no such thing as absolute freedom. The things that do exist are visions – for example, of living autonomously, no matter what bubble or tube you're in at the moment. The tank is indeed the space that surrounds me, but in the course of this project, it became increasingly clear to me that I myself am a type of tank. I already regulate myself. That's why I wanted to be in the tank myself and work on a solo piece. In the three parts of "TANK", we also work with body objects by Devi Saha, and these help me extend my body. We produce surreal images of physicality. For example, I expand my fat dance technique and my flesh dance technique with more flesh. I keep extending myself by putting on synthetic flesh prostheses.

This text is an abridged version of an interview published in the magazine *HI, ROBOT! Man Machine Festival*, 2019.

Curators: Mijke Harmsen, Bettina Masuch, Anaïs Emilia Rödel (*)



Doris Uhlich, TANK © Axel Lambrette



Joint programmes

Claiming Common Spaces

An alliance programme series

In June 2018, the alliance launched an annual festival series called "Claiming Common Spaces". Each alliance member organises events focusing on specific aspects of the production houses' key thematic focuses. Both old and new working practices are examined in labs and discussions featuring artists, researchers and activists. Participating artists also show their latest installations and performances. The first instalment of "Claiming Common Spaces" (CCS) focussed on the theme of "Art and Urban Practices" and took place in June 2018 at HAU Hebbel am Ufer. In May 2019, the alliance organised the second CCS instalment, this time at FFT and tanzhaus nrw. Drawing on the theme of "Art and Digital Life", participants discussed the question of how "the digital" as a common field of activity for artistic work and its contexts can be shaped.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2020 instalment of the festival scheduled to take place at Kampnagel in Hamburg was postponed and will now be held in 2021 under the theme "Commons". This programme will focus on successful co-existence, a different understanding of politics and a careful joint curating beyond competition and the pursuit of profit. The Frankfurt edition of the CCS will likely take place that same year and focus on the themes of post-colonialism and multi-perspective practices. Participants will be invited to negotiate the necessary free space that art and cultural institutions absolutely need for interdisciplinary discourse as well as for the enabling of artistic processes. In 2022, the fifth instalment of CCS will take place simultaneously in Dresden and Essen under the heading of "sustainability", whereby the focus will be on the urgent need for a new ecology.

Claiming Common Spaces I

Art and Urban Practice

21–23 June 2018
at HAU Hebbel
am Ufer Berlin

Cities are our homes, our stages, our creations. They set the rhythm and determine how we move through time and space. More than 50 years ago, in his essay "The Right to the City", the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre described the urban fabric, urban architecture and urban life as a mirror image of society's challenges. His visions and critical assessments of the city of the future have long since become part of our common reality.

Based on these themes, each member of the alliance developed a wide-ranging programme that was presented in June 2018 on the stages of HAU Hebbel am Ufer and at various outdoor locations in Berlin. Artists, urban researchers, activists and roughly 3,000 visitors engaged with the most crucial aspects of the diverse global urban societies of the 21st century as well as with current socio-political developments in urban centres.

The festival centred on international artistic works that were created in and for urban spaces, such as "Corbeaux" by the French-Moroccan choreographer Bouchra Ouizguen and "McDonald's Radio University" by the Japanese artist Akira Takayama (a lecture series developed in McDonald's restaurants together with refugee teachers) and the project "Proyecto Pregunta", an interactive and collective catalogue of questions that is constantly expanding and growing based on conversations with urban inhabitants and was created by the artists collective MIL M2 from Santiago de Chile.



Bouchra Ouizguen, Corbeaux © Dorothea Tuch

Claiming Common Spaces II Art and Digital Life



Maps & Commons – The city in platform capitalism © Katja Illner

**23–25 May 2019
at FFT and tanzhaus
 nrw in Düsseldorf**

The focus at the second instalment of CCS was on the question of how digital culture is shaping our coexistence and the conditions for production and reception in the performative arts.

The German-British performance collective Gob Squad opened the three-day working meeting with their commissioned work “I Love You, Goodbye. (The Digital Detox Edition)” and dedicated the evening to our love-hate relationship with the internet. The lab bearing the title “Maps & commons – The city in platform capitalism” then explored the possibilities of a critical intervention in the current dynamics of urban development, for example, by means of mapping and counter-mapping strategies in the urban space of Düsseldorf. Under the title “Digital materialism”, participants took up a dance perspective to examine how the materiality of the body changes through encounters with digital technologies. In the performance “Phoenix”, Éric Minh Cuong Castaing adopted methods of cultural hacking to show how surveillance technologies can be used for subversive artistic practices. In “The theatre of digital natives” laboratory, representatives of different generations and disciplines gathered to discuss issues relating to the future viability of theatre. Over 1,500 visitors attended the three-day festival and contributed to further labs, installations, workshops and performances created by a number of different artists, experts and activists.

Academies Ongoing training for the independent performing arts community

One of the alliance’s key priorities is the development of programmes to foster the ongoing training and professional development of members of the independent theatre and performing arts community. In keeping with this priority, the alliance created three academy formats designed to provide further training in side-specific content and practice. First up was the Academy for Performing Arts Producers in 2018, that was followed by the Academy for Contemporary Theatre Journalism in the autumn of 2019. One year later, the next training programme, which is called the “Academy for Arts and Encounters”, will start and take on the themes of participation, inclusion and new social practices as artistic strategies.



↑↑ Katja Sonnemann (standing) with academy participants at PACT Zollverein © Dirk Rose
 ↑ Participants at tanzhaus nrw © Katja Illner

Academy for Performing Arts Producers

Production management, producer, creative producer, company management ... there are several names out there to describe a professional field that has become essential to the production of contemporary performing arts in the past several years, but for which there is no official academic training programme. The work carried out by producers ranges from artistic-creative work to administrative management tasks and is, at best, an integral part of the artistic process. In the independent performing arts community, the individuals carrying out these tasks usually navigate their way through the extensive field by gaining hands-on experience; but many of them are now increasingly looking for opportunities to acquire further qualifications and engage in an exchange of experiences.

The Academy for Performing Arts Producers was launched in 2018 with support from the Alliance of International Production Houses and is designed as a response to this emerging need. It is a continuing-education programme that is already in its third year and fully dedicated to imparting skills in the realm of German and international performing-arts production. It also seeks to highlight the role of independent producers in partnership with artists and production houses.

The jury of the academy comprises representatives of the production houses plus an external expert as well as the head of the academy. The jury selects 22 individuals from the large number of applications to participate in the three-part continuing-education programme, which is structured in the form of workshop formats. Experts from Germany and abroad teach participants the legal and administrative basics as well as specific production methods and tools. The instructors showcase networks and platforms and also work to develop strategies and models of producing arts on the independent scene. In peer-to-peer formats, participants exchange experiences and expertise and also explore the demands and opportunities associated with the profession. The spectrum of topics up for discussion ranges from defining the profession, community networking, working in international contexts, communication tools, financing, tax law, distribution, marketing, diversity, strategies for sustainable working models and more. In view of the Covid-19 crisis, there will be a special instalment of the academy in the 2020/2021 season; at this edition, the alumni of the previous three academies will examine old and new challenges and discuss how they will be able to work – and how they will want to work – in the future.

Katja Sonnemann is the initiator and head of the Academy for Performing Arts Producers. She is a freelance producer, lecturer, mentor and consultant at the Wilson*Boles Agency. She has worked in the past with Rimini Protokoll and andcompany& Co., at the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, at the Maxim Gorki Theater and at the Festival Theater der Welt 2005, among others.

Academy for Contemporary Theatre Journalism

The very first Academy for Contemporary Theatre Journalism took place from November 2019 to March 2020 on the initiative of the Alliance of International Production Houses. Twenty theatre critics from all over Germany discussed in Essen, Dresden and Hamburg the opportunities and expectations relating to a type of journalism that corresponds with the multifaceted productions and methods of producing contemporary theatre. Academy organisers Esther Boldt and Philipp Schulte speak here with two of the participants, freelance author Theresa Luise Gindlstrasser and taz editor Jan-Paul Koopmann, about their experiences, solidarity and the future of criticism.

Esther Boldt What prompted each of you to apply to participate in the academy?

Jan-Paul Koopmann I never get the opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues about texts outside of specific assignments, texts that don't originate as part of a current production flow. The idea of reflecting on fundamental issues and discussing them with colleagues is something that never happens in my everyday work.

Theresa Luise Gindlstrasser The same applies to me, too.

Esther Boldt What is your impression of the academy so far? Has it fulfilled your expectations?

Theresa Luise Gindlstrasser I would first compliment the jury on their selection of participants. It is a very well-rounded group, made up of a very different people from different age groups and different media, including television, radio and newspapers. The participants are in different positions in those media, for example, there are editors, trainees and freelance employees. This makes it a balanced group, but also a diverse one. In other words, we never run out of topics to discuss.

Jan-Paul Koopmann And we always manage to find each other on some lever or another. Like you said, it's a very diverse group, but the thing that we're all interested in is contemporary forms, contemporary theatre.

Philipp Schulte I'm not a critic, but it looks to me like theatre reviews and criticism – much like writing in general – is primarily a lonely activity. Certain types of discussions, moments of solidarity,



Esther Boldt, Jan-Paul Koopmann, Theresa Luise Gindlstrasser, Philipp Schulte at Kampnagel (from left to right) © Janet Hesse

moments of exchange – these are perhaps unusual outside of a certain media structure or hierarchy. Am I right in saying that?

Theresa Luise Gindlstrasser Yes, I also think there's a big difference between writing, on the one hand, and art and theatre on the other. Discussions, exchange and the notion of a work-in-progress are always part of the process of art and theatre. At the academy, we had concentrated discussions about our texts without any production pressure, and this also distinguishes them, for example, from the blog of the Theatertreffen. I learned a lot at the blog, but at the same time I was always busy kicking out texts.

Esther Boldt There's definitely a form of exchange that happens in editorial offices. In the best case scenario, there's a discussion about the meaning and purpose of a text, and authors also get feedback from their supervising editors.

Jan-Paul Koopmann Yes, but that's a completely different level. We engage in that kind of discussion every day too, of course, we have to, and we talk about individual texts when it comes to editing. But we don't talk about the fundamentals in editorial meetings. At the academy, however, a space is opened up where precisely those key questions can be discussed: What is contemporary theatre? What kinds of shapes does it assume? What subjects does it examine? And what does it mean to write about theatre? At

conventional editorial meetings, we simply don't have time to have those kinds of discussions.

Theresa Luise Gindlstrasser Preliminary decisions about whether a text will be a critical review or not, and what the nature of the critique should be – these decisions have always already been made in advance. At the academy, however, we questioned precisely this framework, and we also considered texts with the idea that they could look completely different if we wanted them to.

Jan-Paul Koopmann Still, the format of a critical review remained astonishingly present at the academy. At the beginning, we looked for other kinds of texts, but we ended up speaking much more about attitudes and about how much of an agenda we should have in critical pieces on specific productions. I took a lot out of that discussion and thought about it a lot later, especially when I was writing texts between the academy weekends.

Philipp Schulte I was amazed that we talked so intensively about texts. The idea of sending out one-line reviews online was much less present than I expected at the beginning. I noticed a definite pleasure in the writing of texts, an enthusiasm for intellectual, written examinations of the performances one has taken in.



Participants in the journalism academy at Kampnagel © Janet Hesse

Esther Boldt Is there a specific moment you experienced at the academy that stuck in your mind, one that you noted as being particularly special?

Jan-Paul Koopmann No, not a specific moment so far. What's special for me is the intensity with which we work. Everyone is totally present. We sit in the theatre until late in the evening, and then the discussion continues the next morning at the breakfast table. This happens not only for days, but also over the course of several modules. I've never experienced that in other work contexts, and it's something I think is very unique to the academy. Plus, the very respectful interaction among the participants. You go out on a limb with drafts and half-finished texts, but I never for a second felt uncomfortable when discussing what I'd written. That's valuable and not something I take for granted.

Theresa Luise Gindlstrasser I can think of two things. First, when we were in Essen, I remember having a discussion about the corrective element in texts. I think this question is one of the most urgent issues of our time – not only in relation to cultural criticism, but also totally concretely in political terms in our democracy. Second, Lisa Lucassen from the performance collective She She Pop was invited to the academy in Dresden, and she said: "What? You believe that performance reviews are actually a dialogue? I've never heard that before!" This clash of ideas ... I found that totally interesting!

Philipp Schulte Do you see the academy as having any specific use beyond its ideational value?

Theresa Luise Gindlstrasser I think we developed a form of solidarity, or at least we generated a level of awareness for each other. I learned that if I want my work to be perceived as an offer to engage in dialogue, then perhaps I need to do more to make that happen.

Jan-Paul Koopmann We already talked about the fact that the group consists of people from very different professional backgrounds, and what's new for me is the cooperation with people who have studied theatre studies. That did me a lot of good and inspired me to read theory differently, that is, not just in relation to specific questions.

Esther Boldt What do you wish for the future of theatre journalism?

Jan-Paul Koopmann I'd like to read more texts by people who think a lot about culture, people who could lead a discussion about theatre in our newspaper without being professional journalists. This would bring other perspectives, other viewers, to the public



Participants at PACT © Dirk Rose

discourse, ones that are different to those of professional critics, whom we still need, of course. We journalists are trained to use particular tools that allow us to write about anything, but I don't always feel good about that. It would be much more interesting to hear from people who are affected differently, especially when it comes to political theatre.

Theresa Luise Gindlstrasser There is so much ego, so much Amazon, so many different star ratings these days. If I could wish for one thing, it would be that criticism would slow down. Not necessarily with regard to production processes, but in relation to modes of social behaviour and judgments. Criticism would become old-fashioned in the best sense of the term; something slow and tentative, something that remains critical not only of the object but also of itself.

Esther Boldt is an author and dance and theatre critic for *nachtkritik.de*, *theatre heute*, *die taz*, *Hessischen Rundfunk* and others.

Dr. Philipp Schulte is a professor for performance theory at the Norwegian Theatre Academy and managing director of the Hessische Theaterakademie (HTA).

Academy for Arts and Encounters

Production houses have increasingly come to see themselves not only as performance venues, but also as meeting places where people of all age groups, cultures and social backgrounds can gather to exchange ideas and explore new perspectives. In this process, the notion of participation as an artistic strategy has become firmly anchored in the concepts that drive the work of many production houses. As a result, a new job profile has emerged at the interface between public relations, dramaturgy and mediation. In 2020, the Alliance of International Production Houses decided to found the Arts and Encounters Academy, the aim of which is to analyse and further develop the artistic, social and political dimensions of this new professional field.

The multifaceted practices involved in fostering meaningful encounters at the alliance's various production houses are characterised by efforts to establish a sustainable and long-term relationship to their diverse audiences as well as to the unique environments at their respective locations. These efforts serve to break down barriers and facilitate cultural access in a number of different directions. The diversity of projects generating new



Katja Heitmann, *Residence in reality* © Hanneke Wetzer



Migrantpolitan at Kampnagel © Julia Steinigeweg

forms of participation reflects the complexity of a professional field that is still emerging and defining itself. The tasks involved in these projects range from the artistic practice of exploring performative strategies of participation and collective authorship all the way to developing measures designed to generate public attention and larger audiences. Some examples of existing spaces that engage in this kind of collaboration are the Migrantpolitan at Kampnagel, the Kulturgarten at HELLERAU and the WerkStadt at PACT Zollverein. At these gathering spaces, knowledge is discussed in detail and experimented with in artistic ways as part of different modes of encounter and research. The Houseclub at HAU Hebbel am Ufer, the “Residenzen im Realen” at tanzhaus nrw, and the “Neugier Abo” at Mousonturm are other examples of this innovative approach. For its part, the FFT Düsseldorf prompted a paradigm shift recently when they launched their “Was ihr wollt” initiative, which invites a select group of audience members to determine the theatre’s programming schedule for one full month.

The Academy for Arts and Encounters serves as a forum for exchange and reflection on existing practices, while also offering a framework in which to experiment with new and yet-to-be invented approaches and tools. The academy’s key mission is to become a meeting place where members are encouraged to use artistic means to examine issues, attitudes and strategies relating to the democratic coexistence of people from different social contexts and backgrounds. The structures that form the basis of the projects themselves will also be subjected to a critical analysis, and the importance of communication among institutions will also be examined. In order to facilitate this process, the academy will make available the existing knowledge of the production houses and encourage participants to examine and further develop this knowledge in the form of practical thematic modules at a series of working sessions.

The Academy for Arts and Encounters is geared towards individuals interested in discussing and jointly developing strategies of participation at the interface between the arts and society. The academy invites everyone to contribute their expertise and insights, whether they be neighbours, activists, communicators, dramaturges, multipliers, educators, art enthusiasts or members of local communities.

Working group Arts and Encounters
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