

IETM PUBLICATION

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IDEA

Inclusion, Diversity, Equality and Accessibility



IETM Munich Plenary Meeting 2018, photo: © Regine Heiland



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IDEA, Inclusion, Diversity, Equality and Accessibility

IETM Publication

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IETM, Satellite Milan 2019, photo: © Massimiliano Monnechi

Foreword

Inclusion has always been at the core of IETM values. In 2018, amidst the rapidly changing world and raising awareness of our members, we worked on a strategy to advance Inclusion, Diversity, Equality and Accessibility (IDEA) within our network and promote those values in the performing arts at large. The strategy addresses both how IETM aims to work within the network itself and how it brings attention to the topic within the global performing arts community: throughout a series of meetings, knowledge sharing, publications, and advocacy.

But let's face it, being inclusive is a never-ending process. Our network is a reflection of the international performing arts sector, where people of different backgrounds are still underrepresented, not given access and are even subject of discrimination. We do hope, however, that IETM – both its members and the Secretariat can help shake the dogmas and pave a way for a more just future.

This publication sheds some light on the different IETM events and publications which brought attention to the topic, and gives voice to six IETM members who each in their unique way describe their stance on inclusion and give us ideas to think about on where the network should be heading in the coming years.

We are also aware that IETM will never reach a destination in this work, there will always be ways to improve. Our membership is rich and diverse, but it could be richer. IETM members and the whole performing arts community need to question their approaches to running their organisations. How they engage with their audiences, whom they are not reaching and whose story they are telling. Performing arts organisations and artists can do much by giving agency to disadvantaged groups, by making them co-creators, by letting them tell their own stories. Each and every one of us has a responsibility.

IETM, as a network, can be a vehicle for change, and in its almost 40 years of existence it has shown it can be a place where gears are shifted and new paradigms are created. Our ongoing trajectory Rewiring the Network gives us promises towards the future, a future which will not be sustainable unless it is inclusive.

Ása Richardsdóttir, IETM Secretary General



IETM Munich Plenary Meeting 2018, photo: © Silke Schmidt

Inclusion is a journey

HOW INCLUSIVE IS THE IETM NETWORK?

This question has been asked at each IETM working session on the topic of inclusion. Indeed, this is a valid question, since the answer reveals who speaks about inclusion and what their experiences are. Equity, diversity and inclusion are core values of IETM, and many members agree that the network is a safe space to celebrate diversity of identities, abilities, and ideas. Yet, a positive attitude is not enough: real actions are needed to foster inclusion.

Being sensitive to the economic inequality of its members, IETM applies differentiated membership fees and provides travel and accommodation grants. In addition, the IETM Secretariat makes efforts to cover diverse geographical regions by organising various format meetings in the North and in the South, in big cities and in smaller towns.

IETM provides free access to all its publications, including reports from the working sessions, to both members and

non-members of the network, thus sharing its knowledge base with anyone interested. Some of the IETM publications are adapted for people with visual impairments.

Securing physical accessibility is part of the procedure of organising IETM meetings. Wheelchair accessibility of meeting venues is being checked and communicated at the early stages of meeting preparation. Since 2016, subtitles and/or sign language translation have been available at every opening speech and some of the working sessions. IETM has also been running a few partnerships with some of the Associate members which brought delegations of

performing art professionals from minority backgrounds to IETM meetings.

A concise review of IETM meetings that touch upon or are dedicated to the vast sphere of inclusion can be traced in **Pippa Bailey's essay, *A journey towards inclusion and diversity at IETM* [page 21]**, where she shares how her thinking and attitude have been influenced by those events.

THE LANGUAGE AND ITS POWER STRUCTURES

It has been noted, and more than once, during IETM discussions, that terminology around the topic conveys the thinking of the dominant group and so hinders the processes of making the sector more inclusive at their very base. **The essay by Israel Aloni [page 9]** offers a critical rethinking of the widely used – and misused – terms of inclusion, diversity, equality.

Suggestions how to alter our terminology in order to make it inclusive can be found in the report from the session ***Everyone has an opinion, but only mine is right***, moderated by Israel Aloni and Jo Verrent at IETM Hull 2019.



IETM Hull 2019, photo: © Thomas Arran

INCLUSION STARTS FROM WITHIN

As simple as a motivational quote on the social media: inclusion has to be initiated by the points of power, and furthermore, these points of power have to be examined critically and reformed from within, so that “inclusion” becomes an actual and sustainable process.

The privilege's blind spot for discrimination (when those of power attribute their position solely to their own virtues and do not acknowledge that their privileges might have played a role as well) exists in the performing arts sector as well. Although IETM offers travel grants, the meetings gather mostly those who can meet the travel and accommodation costs (via grant or at their own expense); who speak English; whose accessibility needs are met; and at the end, who are at such a point in their careers that they can benefit from international exchange and collaborations. Recognising such privileges is the first step towards inclusivity of art practices and organisations – that is the opinion expressed in many of the working sessions dedicated to diversity and inclusion.

Other centres, the opening speech at IETM Porto Plenary Meeting 2018, is just one example of the “eye-openers” to one's unrealised privileges that IETM meetings offer to their participants.

The report from Postcolonial minefields, a session at IETM Munich Plenary Meeting 2018, traces the big narrative of colonial oppression and cultural discrimination. We should face the truth that we are colonial creatures: our models of thinking, our concepts are shaped in colonial times but arts give the opportunity to deconstruct our codes and to find the new concepts and meanings of the Postcolonial – was the conclusion the group reached at this session.

The City of arrival report from IETM Brussels Plenary Meeting 2017 contributes to the big picture by exploring how our cities change due to globalisation and in times of massive migrant flows towards Europe. Inevitably, this affects the way we all co-exist, and rearranges our “map of identities”.

Realising that every person is a set of multiple identities (gender, race, social position, sexuality, ethnicity, age, ability, and so on) can help seeing the human being behind the label and alleviating prejudices towards the “different” ones. That is the way to stop seeing people as “refugees”, “women”, “black”, “middle aged”, “rich”, “disabled” but as multifaceted individuals so that a truly inclusive community is formed. In her essay *Identity, Inclusion, and Possibility*, Dianne K. Webb's offers a plan of how to embrace multiple identities' model in order to transform our organisations from within and make them truly inclusive safe spaces for collaboration.

If realising one's privileges and prejudices is the first step to begin an inclusion process, opening up for a conversation with “the others” is the next one. Speaking of the importance of this conversation and the proactive role artists should play in it, Jesper de Neergaard, in his essay *How Dare We* [page 18], says: “What is important now is not to focus on converting people to ‘holy humanism’, but try to understand these people whom we actually do not know enough and whom we so superficially tend to look down to.” This kind of non judgemental understanding of the other is the base for accreting plurality of opinions, embracing diversity, and hence, it offers a solid foundation for a true inclusion to be fulfilled.



Everyone has an opinion, but only mine is right, IETM Hull 2019, photo: © Thomas Arran

INCLUSION IS ABOUT SHARING AND GIVING AWAY POWER

When commenting on ways to diversify the audience, many performing art practitioners expressed the opinion that one cannot have a diverse audience if the organisation behind the artistic product is not truly diverse – which means having various identity sets on the steering wheel of decision making.

Mind the gap: audience, governance and politics, a report from IETM Munich 2018, and Cultural democracy in practice from IETM Hull 2019, offer practical examples of embracing diversity at the very core of the power structure and the inspiring results when risks pay off. Matt Fenton, Artistic Director at Contact Theatre, Manchester (UK) and Keisha Thompson, Young people's producer at Contact Theatre, explain the procedures through which young people have their say on every level of their organisation: from hiring the artistic director, to programming and creating theatre. If you are a youth theatre and want young audiences at your shows, you should let crucial decision making in the hands of the young, Matt believes. He is reassured by the numerous successful seasons of his theatre and the wide positive response among the young, no less important than approval of the funding bodies or the press. The rest of the examples from the UK, Serbia, Croatia and Italy in these reports prove that inclusion through shared decision making is a sustainable practice. The report Please turn off your cell phone from IETM Rijeka Plenary Meeting 2019 outlines the understanding of audience inclusion as giving the audience a possibility to take part in decision making.

Everyday creators: friends or foes? from IETM Hull dedicated to the topics of inclusion, goes one step further as one of the speakers, Stella Duffy, ardently pleads for anyone middle-aged and white to step back from power and make place for an



Postcolonial Minefields, IETM Munich 2018, photo: © Silke Schmidt

unprivileged person to head the decision making. Fun Palaces, the initiative she presented as a celebration of everyday creativity, challenges the understanding that there is an opposition between professional artists and everyday creators, thus making art practice as inclusive as possible. Anupama Sekhar brought in an Asian/South Asian perspective on amateur vs. professional art which proved it can be fluid in this context as well, especially in the case of festivals, celebrations, rethinking of traditional art forms into contemporary pieces.

When looking into the multitude of art project examples shared across several IETM sessions on inclusion, one can get the impression that participatory art projects are the 'ultimate tool' for achieving inclusion of new individuals and groups, thus attracting new audiences.

It should be noted that inclusivity is indeed a positive effect of participatory art practices, "naturally" achieved thanks to the principles of cultural democracy and open decision-making process, of giving the agency to the participants, of embracing their artistic choices. Assuming this is the only (best) way to achieve inclusion will be again applying stereotypes. Participatory art projects, as any art practices that foster inclusivity, like documentary theatre, shared decision-making, etc., have this specific trait: they invite the – collaborative – creation of a brand new artistic content.

DIVERSITY OF CONTENT BRINGS DIVERSITY IN THE AUDIENCE

Some of the audience diversification initiatives usually wreck into what is labelled as a "lack of acquired taste" of those who are supposed to be "included". But if you want to see new people coming to your place, you have to take the risk and offer new content which resonates with them; and it is worth trying to co-create with them – that is the main message of the speakers of the sessions Cultural democracy in practice, Everyday creators at IETM Hull Plenary Meeting 2019 or at the numerous sessions dedicated to artistic creation outside the urban areas. Translated into concrete examples, this means that if you want Muslim teenage girls in the audience, you stage a piece that is relevant for them, and you do it with them; or if you want to enter a local community to make art, you had better work with the culture that is already there, instead of imposing unfamiliar external narratives.

Certainly, this alters your artistic pursuits and carries a risk, but when the stake is opening the path for a genuine and sustainable inclusiveness of your artistic practice, it is worth the effort. In his essay ***Open the door: including the audience in the creative process*** [page 24] Matteo Lanfranchi, the founder and artistic director of Effetto Larsen, reveals how their repertoire and their overall artistic practice changed when they introduced audience-created content.

Working with content that stems from real life experiences of certain groups and individuals – often dramatic, traumatic, controversial and open to debates – brings up the ethical question: whose voice is actually telling the story? As it was underlined at several IETM sessions on the topics of diversity and inclusion, it is crucial to make sure that the voices of the “protagonists” of the story are not substituted by someone from the majority groups. The IETM Valencia 2016 session Whose story is this, anyway? shared the success stories of The Eclipse Theatre (UK), Opera Theatre Amsterdam, and Creative Scotland in working with people from minority backgrounds, including those with disabilities. Many thought-provoking examples were also shared at the IETM Wales Satellite meeting 2018 dedicated to art in rural areas, presented in the report Fields of Vision. Other voices, rural places, global stories. The participatory project We're Still Here of National Theatre Wales and Panodrama's (Hungary) documentary theatre especially put the focus on working with personal stories and giving a voice to those who are not usually being heard.

While ‘inclusion’ is most often applied to processes of giving agency to disadvantaged groups that are already present in the society, the refugee crisis started in 2015 – with the urgent need for immediate interventions – added a whole new layer of meaning. IETM responded to that by opening space for dialogue and collaboration, and prepared a series of publications on various facets of art and displacement. In 2016, IETM, in collaboration with UCLG - Agenda 21 for Culture and Culture Action Europe, published the extensive mapping Creation and Displacement: Developing new narratives around migration. In 2019, the follow-up, Everybody wants a refugee on stage, was released. Again, the multitude of examples in the mappings demonstrates that creating together and embracing refugees’ own stories brings positive change in the situation of humanitarian, psychological, and existential crises migrants are thrown into.

TOWARDS NEW AESTHETICS

Inclusion in the arts is not only about opening your organisations to everybody, giving agency and creating relevant content. It also means embracing diverse aesthetics that differ from the globally-spread palette of Europe-centric able-bodied artistic techniques.

Other abilities, evolving aesthetics?, a session at IETM Valencia Plenary meeting 2016, opened the conversation on how different abilities are represented in contemporary dance – and how this encourages new explorations and artistic innovation. Permission to Stare. Arts and Disability was published by IETM in 2017, in collaboration with the British Council. The publication explores the different approaches to disability in the performing arts, with a particular focus on contemporary dance. Another valuable resource on how embracing disability in the arts calls for new aesthetics that are exciting and fruitful, and trigger new development in the artform is the detailed report from the Satellite meeting in Milan 2019, dedicated to sign language as a medium for artistic communication. Reflecting the three days of workshops, meeting sessions and an artistic programme, the Loud silences. Languages, accessibility and cultural hegemony report broadens the topic with the discussions about the place of minority languages in a world of cultural hegemony, about theatre as a specific language and the ability of art to empower those who are made visible through its acts.

ARTISTS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Art has the power to influence the society we live in and attempts to imagine a better, more democratic and sustainable world*. The Fortress Europe sessions series – a session at IETM Bergamo Plenary meeting 2015, the one at IETM Budapest Plenary meeting 2015 and the concluding one at IETM Amsterdam Plenary meeting 2016 – is IETM’s response to the performing arts community’s need to share reflections, experiences, recommendations and artistic solutions to the critical issues of refuge and migration. The Fortress Europe report formulates concrete principles of working with refugees on artistic projects: autonomy of work, agency to the refugee participants, payment for their work, engagement of communities and collaborative creation. These principles are premises for sustainable inclusion of refugees in the cultural life of the societies they are seeking asylum in. Many stories shared through the above mentioned publications, Creation and Displacement and Everybody wants a refugee on stage, demonstrate how engaging with art helped overcoming trauma and urged successful integration in the new society. Or, the least, helped alleviate the grim reality of life in refuge.

Similar experiences of empowerment through art of the disadvantaged groups were shared at the Satellite meeting in Milan, and are featured in the meeting report mentioned above. Talks and publications on arts in rural areas, brought out numerous examples of how art empowers local communities, by making them visible and giving them the agency to make their voice heard. Arts in rural areas. Meanwhile in the countryside. Artistic creation outside the urban areas, and the above-mentioned report from the Satellite Wales.

* A critical review on how arts interfere and engage with politics: D. Gorman, “The Art of Disobedience. Fresh Perspectives on Arts and Politics”, IETM, Brussels, October 2015



Other Centres, IETM Porto 2018, photo: © Cesar Coriolano

LEARNING BY DOING

Just how far can we go? [page 12] ask Clara Giraud and Jo Verrent, managers at [Unlimited](#) (UK), in an attempt to outline the next steps IETM could take to advocate for diversity and inclusion among its members and the cultural sector as a whole. In their essay, the two authors share their organisation's route to inclusion, which shows clearly it is a work in progress, with valuable lessons learned from practice and in exchange of knowledge with other organisations.

Sadly, dominant culture and deeply rooted preconceptions are rigid enough to turn inclusion processes backwards once the pressure is eased. As we see from [Let's act now: on gender as a political issue](#) (IETM Bucharest Plenary Meeting 2017) and [Of Boxes and Ceilings. Fresh Perspectives on Arts and Gender](#) (P. Charhon, 2016), gender bias and discrimination are still burning issues. Hence, constant efforts and actions are needed to counteract discriminative injustice of our society.

[Towards an inclusive culture](#) at IETM Amsterdam Plenary Meeting in 2016 outlined recommendations to IETM how to foster sustainable inclusion. In 2018, the IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equality and Accessibility) strategy was developed and adopted. It is a bottom up strategy to make the network more diverse, with activities that are more inclusive and accessible, reaching out to performing arts professionals from all backgrounds. IETM General Assembly in 2019 decided to create the IDEA group, now formed by a dedicated group of 12 highly motivated IETM members. The group holds regular meetings online where they discuss current issues as well as outline trajectories for the future. They play a key role in shaping IETM's vision for inclusion, diversity, equality and accessibility.

Inclusion is not the purpose, but the means as the pledge is contemporary performing arts representing and inspiring the whole of society.

Vassilka Shishkova,
Cultural commentator

Inclusion & Diversity

BY ISRAEL ALONI



City of Arrival, IETM Brussels 2017, photo: © Jana Gellinck



Israel Aloni

Artistic Director & Co-Founder of iIDance. Independent choreographer, educator, performer, writer and cultural entrepreneur.

Initiated iIDance in 2012 together with Lee Brummer and the organization has been based in Gothenburg, Sweden since then.

Additionally, they are on the advisory board of both Tasdance (Australia) and BIRCA (Denmark)

Aloni lives in Melbourne, Australia and challenges norms of relating to a singular time and/or place.

IETM member since 2013.

Notions of inclusion and diversity have been part of the discourse and actions of the contemporary performing arts for as long as I can remember. In the 1990s, the discourse amongst contemporary dance artists orbited around the physical body. We were concerned with the form, colour, size and ability of the bodies that were performing and making the art. The questions were about authentically representing the demographics of the societies that the art is made in, with, for and about. In dance, changes happen very rapidly. Perhaps it is the ephemerality of the artform or the heritage of the early practices of dance as a medium for transcendence. We have ventured through modern dance, post-modern dance, contemporary dance, non-dance and post-dance within just forty years and we are still changing swiftly. Many of these phases of evolution have been direct responses to the social and political realities at the time and promoting burning issues in society. In many cases, an individual artist or a group of them would push the artform into a new realm in order to stay relevant in society and furthermore, they often aspired to trigger the public discourse and evoke fresh thinking about their realities.

Dance artists have been willing to question all that they know to be true only to catalyse the thinking and actions of the societies in which they operate. In Anna Helprin's Dancers Workshop in San Francisco, way back in the 1950's, one could find dancers who belonged to marginalised groups of society. She didn't work with them solely because of their cultural heritage, ethnicity or socio-economic status. She simply wanted to work with people and even then, she knew that people are people...

In other words, dance might be a good case-study when addressing matters of diversity, inclusion, accessibility and equality.

However, in my experience, the processes of addressing these invaluable matters have been sterilised and hijacked by strategic language and bureaucratic procedures. Despite the topic being addressed in various ways and in different intensities over many decades, there is still much more work left to do. Despite many attempts and initiatives to bring change, we are still operating within a system which is bonded to neoliberal capitalism. Compartmentalisation is a marketing strategy in capitalism because the more divided the market is to different groups,

the more products one manufactures with the claim to meet the specific needs of each particular group.

Additionally, segregation has been used as a tool to gain power by many regimes throughout history. When a community is isolated and is not aware of what happens elsewhere it is easily manipulated and controlled. Knowledge is power and if those who rule hold more knowledge than the people, then it is clear who is in control.

Real changes happen when people gather around an ideology. A strong value that speaks volumes to the people, would change the way they think and sequentially, their behaviour.

Today, dark clouds of regression are hovering above us all. Governments all over the world are promoting ideas of segregation and division. They fuel ignorance and discrimination. Many politicians are using tactics of polarisation and demonisation in their campaigns. They talk more about how bad, cruel, evil and stupid their opponents are rather than promoting any coherent and structured ideologies or agendas of their own.

This behaviour infects other contexts. It seems humanity can gather around calls for action concerning the ecological crisis but fails to express solidarity towards other humans. Basic freedoms are confiscated from people in China, the Middle East, Africa, the USA – Mexico border, the Russia – Ukraine border as well as in so-called Western and privileged societies where neurodiverse, gender-diverse, body-diverse individuals are bullied, harassed and murdered on a daily basis and many, many, many more examples. But we easily turn a blind eye and go on with our lives.

Many of us think that if we see queer individuals on mainstream television and we have a minister in our government who is a wheelchair user, we have arrived at a place of inclusion and diversity. But this could not be further from the truth.



Mind the gap: audience, governance and politics, IETM Munich 2018, photo: © Regine Heiland

Just like other aspects of our reality, the marketing is surpassing the truth. The image that we are sold is that we have done a good job and we have learnt the lesson but in actuality we have not been able to spread a genuine ideology of compassion and solidarity. We are still segregated, divided, demonising and alienating.

I believe that language constructs realities. It frames our thoughts and delivers our ideas to other minds. The words we choose to describe our aspirations are crucial to the accuracy of their realisation. We live in a fast-paced reality and within an infinite intellectual ocean that deluges us with information. Choosing the language with which we express ourselves is often a process of conformity and obedience. More often than not, we choose the commonly accepted terms to discuss such large topics. Sequentially, these terms become content-less and meaning-less brands which perpetuate the existing power structures in our society.

I would like to suggest that it is crucial to invest the time and energy it takes to truly examine the language we use when promoting our ideas, if we really want to catalyse a change.

After years of conversations, publications and actions around the topic, IETM established the IDEA group. IDEA stands for Inclusion, Diversity, Equality and Accessibility. Whilst the intention is pure and the action is necessary, I believe that the language is perpetuating the same mechanism that led us to our current situation.

Inclusion suggests structural and political hierarchy. Someone is already at the desired place and invites others to also be included there.

Diversity also suffers from inaccuracy and deficiencies by suggesting that there is only one stream which just needs to be diversified.

Equality could also suggest oneness, which is obscure. When using the term equality, one should be required to explain – equal in what? Equal in opportunities? Equal in value? Equal in reward? Equal in all?

Furthermore, we need to be more articulate and precise in order not to confuse equality with homogenisation and standardisation, which inherently contradicts the initial proposition.



Please turn off your cell phone, IETM Rijeka 2019, photo: ©Tanja Kanazir

Accessibility is of a different nature because it addresses the need for decision-makers to acknowledge the entire demographics of a society and not a singular body, culture or community. I think accessibility should be treated as a political synonym to democracy. As long as we aspire to a democratic society, we ought to aspire to fully accessible public spaces and services.

A quick comment about accessibility, we are far from fully embracing accessible practice in contemporary performing arts because the majority of opportunities for artists depend on writing abilities and skills which are extremely particular and therefore eradicate the option for many artists to access resources. Also, in the globalised capitalistic economy, in order to make a living as an independent contemporary performing artist, one must be able and willing to fully submerge oneself in the overwhelming reality of the multi-tasking, overworking, burnout-provoking race. Again, not something that is by nature accessible to many.

A few suggestions I would like to workshop as possible alternatives to the above terms are Pluralism, which speaks to the distribution of power in society and the legitimacy for minority groups to sustain authority and influence on the whole; Coexistence which suggests a wholesome

environment for each and every part of society without risking or jeopardising others' freedom and without expressing any need for assimilation; Heterogenism (counter to common thinking, the word hetero refers to differences and otherness) this is a new word I created to try and speak about internal variety without referring to external criteria; and there is the good old Human Rights which can promote the right to access, the right to be included, the right to be free and unapologetic, the right to be one's self, the right to influence one's own environment, the right to have a voice that counts, the right to be seen by the people in power, the right to be in power, the right to express one's opinions and the right to choose how much to engage in socio-political dynamics.

I wonder if we learned to want to be inclusive because it is something that is expected of us in the cultural sector and introduced via cultural policies that are constituted by the political party in power. Perhaps it is the words we use which are no longer relevant.

Even in IETM, there is a genuine desire to be meaningful and instrumental to a broad variety of organisations and individuals. But in practice the network cannot really be completely open. I often think what will happen if some radical religious organisation would ask to join IETM but

request that all members belonging to one sex cover themselves and not speak in public? Would IETM accept such demands for the sake of being "inclusive"?

I guess we have all got our limits.

We want to involve everybody because we might think that it would make us better people or reinforce the broad relevance of what we do. But I suspect that most of us will not be willing to give up all of our own freedoms in the process.

It is important that we ask ourselves whether we promote such ideas with genuine interest and sincere beliefs or we are being manipulated by trendy politics and as a result, conform to the idea that more is better and therefore, the contemporary performing arts must, like capitalism, broaden our market (read audiences).

Real changes in behaviour depend on real changes in mindset and ideology. To change our thinking, we should change our language. What are the right words to describe what we are actually trying to do? Should we, artists, borrow the language from the policymakers or should we lead the way with new and alternative language?

Just how far can we go?

BY CLARA GIRAUD & JO VERRENT



Jo Verrent

Jo Verrent is Senior Producer of Unlimited, a funding programme commissioning disabled artists in the UK. Jo believes that 'different' is delicious, not divergent. She works in arts & culture at strategic levels with national agencies and on the ground with organisations/ individuals embedding the belief that diversity adds texture, turning policy into real action.

IETM member since 1995.



Clara Giraud

Clara Giraud was Project Manager of Unlimited 2014-2019, she now works with the Mayor of London's Culture Team, and as a freelance culture consultant. Clara has been an IETM member since 2012 and is currently on the Advisory Committee of IETM. She is passionate about change, and cultural tools to support social and environmental shifts.



Everyday creators: friends or foes?, IETM Hull 2019, photo: © Thomas Arran

IETM's journey navigating questions of inclusion

We cannot pretend everything is accessible to everyone. As an international network that brings cultural workers together, cultural context will always be a limitation. But we can try, first by acknowledging the barriers that exist and then by removing those that are most relevant in a practical context. IETM's strength lies in connecting worlds, and the network radiates when this happens.

The IETM network holds a richness of diversity, and yet simultaneously there are questions about whom the network does not include or represent yet. As managers of *Unlimited*, a funding programme for work by disabled artists in the UK, based within a longstanding member of the network, *Artsadmin*, we have observed and participated in conversations, challenges and changes around access and inclusion.

The last few years have seen inclusion seep its way to the core of IETM's principles and working groups, and the change has been felt with energetic and positive ripples in the network and beyond.

In 2016, a *session in Valencia* presented the richness of practices by disabled artists. In *Munich in 2018*, IETM shined a light on the rarely engaged hip hop scene, bringing

out unexpected dance moves from the delegates, and echoing the diversity of the city, reminding us of the cultures and sub-cultures of each urban context. The *Milan Satellite in 2019* tackled the ever-present question of language supremacy and how the network navigates this, through the lens of Deaf culture, introducing members to the Italian Deaf-led performance sector and all its wealth; *the Hull plenary in 2019* focused on inclusion from multiple perspectives.

As IETM celebrates its accomplishments in addressing questions of inclusion in the last few years, we wonder, what is next? Should every part of the cultural sector have to respond to the needs of disabled people – as audiences, participants and artists? Or should this response remain a possibility amongst many other competing priorities in different contexts? How might we delve into these 'grey areas' while remaining ambitious and challenging the status quo?

To look outward, one first has to look inward. These are some key learning moments we have had at Unlimited within this timeframe that have pushed and challenged our thinking and practice.

Opening the door to let change in

Unlimited is a funding programme initiated by Arts Council England, commissioning new work by disabled artists based in the United Kingdom. A legacy of the London Olympics 2012 and its world premiere Para-Cultural Olympiad, the programme acknowledges the barriers that exist for disabled artists to enter the mainstream and grow in their artistic ambitions. It is a programme that has been highly successful in meeting its aims to trigger change in the cultural sector in the UK, though there is still much to do. The model was picked up and adapted by both the Rio Olympics 2016 and Tokyo Olympics 2020, each time supporting a local disabled-led arts scene through funding and major showcasing. As Paris prepares for the 2024 Olympics, we have engaged in a dialogue with them to share our working models – but this raises questions about how a country like France that does not categorise people through personal characteristics (such as identifying as disabled, by religious beliefs and so on), can approach positive action models.

Different contexts can open up new ways of seeing things and addressing challenges – this has led to a number of key learning moments for Unlimited.

In 2017, one of our team members went to Canada to attend the Deaf and Disability Arts Presenters Programme, part of the [Canada Scene Festival](#) in Ottawa curated by [Tangled Art +Disability](#), followed by the [Republic of Inclusion](#), a ‘psychedelic symposium’ where a relaxed, accessible space allowed a free flowing exchange of ideas and anecdotes, punctuated by irreverent performance. Access provisions were innovative, surprising and different to what we might more usually provide in the UK. It led us to make significant differences to our own access offer for Unlimited: The Symposium in 2018, providing, for example, a live streamed relaxed viewing room alongside the main auditorium. It started us on a journey

towards greater respect for language, in particular around intersectional identities, meaning that pronouns are now stated at our events on name badges and our email signature strips.

In 2017, Unlimited commissioned an international collaboration between Welsh playwright Kaite O'Reilly and Singaporean dramaturge Peter Sau, involving disabled artists from both countries and placing disabled artists on a professional level equally. This was a first for Singapore. The play tackled questions of disabled identity and rights for the British and Singaporeans, shining a light on delicate and sometimes taboo subjects in both societies, such as family and cultural standpoints, historic perspectives and the rights of commerce set against those of equality. These combining factors made for a seismic shift in how disability is viewed in the Singaporean cultural sector. In 2019, the Singaporean National Day Parade featured disabled artist Danial Bawthan, who had first performed in the Unlimited commission, in a prominent role as a rapper alongside other young Singaporean pop and music stars. The way that they featured him and included voices and stories from those previously ‘hidden’ was really notable and the parade showcased their agency in art rather than as figures of charity or pity as has previously been the case.

Small steps, big shifts

In 2017, Unlimited launched [Cards for Inclusion](#), a card game to help develop a positive, solution-focused attitude to access for disabled people. Piloted via IETM (in peripheries of meetings in Brussels, Hull and Milan), and through other international gatherings, the aim was to create a tool that sparked conversations and changed mindsets, and that could resonate internationally. But can one tool truly work internationally? Whilst language was kept to a minimum, and illustrations

play a key part in the information on the cards, we have had to acknowledge that simply ‘translating’ the minimal text isn’t enough. Cultural reference points need amending too for some contexts – an illustration communicating ‘a festival’ is very different in the UK and a Taiwanese context, for example. This has led us to support the Taiwan Access for All Association to create a new set of cards with new illustrations by a local disabled artist that will be relevant throughout the Chinese-speaking world. We had to acknowledge that if the content of the game remains rooted in a Western aesthetic, the concepts of inclusion it raises are easier to dismiss. If what we care about is the impact of the cards, then the only way for these to truly succeed was for us to ‘let go’ of our model of what might work, and let someone else create their version, drawing on their own cultural perspective, to include new voices into the #cardsforinclusion conversation.

We have been involved in deliberate efforts to bring new voices to IETM, to identify and remove barriers that are getting in the way of greater diversity, in order to invite a multiplicity of voices to the network. Since 2016, Unlimited and British Council have been supporting UK-based professionals identifying as disabled and/or people of colour to attend IETM meetings. This has entailed close conversations with meeting organisers and IETM staff about access needs, including quiet spaces, ramps, captioning, to name a few. For some people, having a ‘taxi fund’ to travel from one venue to another makes all the difference as to whether they can attend and take part in a meeting. For others, knowing they have pastoral support and someone to go to in case of heightened anxiety or other mental health shifts, means they can more readily engage with the meeting and have a safety net if they need it.

Over the years, we have seen the impact of our delegates in the way the meetings are run, with live captioning now provided for keynote speeches, and quiet rooms clearly indicated for all to access a bit of a rest from the intensity of plenary meetings. To date, few of our delegates go on to join IETM as members – and this is something we will be investigating next year in order to give more feedback to the network. But this certainly highlights the opportunities that lie ahead for IETM to embed questions of access and inclusion into its ways of working.

At the April 2018 [plenary meeting in Porto](#), a panel discussion about access in the performing arts in Portugal went on to trigger change throughout the country. It laid the groundwork for a range of systemic challenges to be made to the cultural ecosystem of the country by [Acesso Cultura](#), the local access organisation on the ground and the Portuguese Arts Council. This inspired [a range of training events](#) and [seminars](#) aimed at developing skills and practice for better embedding of access and inclusion in the Portuguese cultural sector.

The last few years have also seen some embedding of more inclusive practices with how the IETM meetings are organised. Live captions to enable audiences, the option to read what is spoken, is now arranged for the majority of keynote speeches. Main venues are required to have step-free access. And most importantly, access provision is communicated and addressed, and the staff have developed an understanding which allows them to be more responsive to access queries. These welcome improvements are becoming the norm within our processes, and that is something we should be proud of.

IETM has always been about inclusion, addressing differences across borders. How can we as a network lead the way to innovate and share best practices with partners around the world, enhancing the depth of cultural exchanges? A world of

opportunities lies ahead of us, and as we listen and learn from each other, we are all enriching our work practices. There is no limit to how far we can go when it comes to diversifying how we work and who we work with, it's an ever evolving and never ending process of growth, and so rather than seeking the end of the journey, we should revel in it, admiring each new surprise that awaits around every corner.



Art in Rural Areas, IETM Hull 2019, photo: © Thomas Arran

Identity, Inclusion, and Possibility

BY DIANNE K. WEBB



Whose story is this, anyway?, IETM Valencia 2016, photo: © Vincent Chartier

“Every individual without exception possesses a composite identity.”

Amin Maalouf



Dianne k. Webb

Dianne K. Webb is director and founder of Next Iteration Ensemble (NIE). As a theatre professional, Webb has spent more than 25 years directing ensemble-based, interactive, original, contemporary, and traditional theatre in both community and professional venues in Maine and Texas.

With a focus on underrepresented voices—women, people of colour, differing ethnicities, genders, and orientations—Webb and NIE endeavor to produce thought-provoking, relevant theatre drawing from influences that include among others—Bausch, Hagan, Artaud and Grotowski. Webb’s vision combines interactive theatre skills, generative work ethic, and ensemble model to produce devised work, contemporary playwrights, and new iterations of well-known pieces.

IETM member since 2019.

I am a work in progress, a person striving to understand how you and I are alike and how we differ, how we bring, through our varied experiences and understandings, a widening and deepening glimpse into the narrative of our humanity and how we can make theatre together. As the founder and director of an intercultural ensemble, one of the most critical aspects of my job is to consider inclusion, what effect our perceptions, stereotypes, points of view, assumptions, experiences, and cultural narratives have on the actors with whom I have the privilege to create, and on the theatre we produce.

As performers, we explore a world of splendid otherness that will be defined over and again by the layering of our composite identities. When I write about inclusion, I must also write about identity. Each of us has a sense of self, an “identity” that has many layers – trans, female, male, non-binary, agender, African, European, Middle Eastern, Asian, East Asian, South Asian, Central, South or North American, First Nations, nationality, family constellation, spirituality, religion, physical ability, queer, straight, lesbian, bisexual, pan sexual, asexual, neurodiversity, (im) migrant, refugee, class, the list goes on. The dominant paradigm (majority) can too easily be the fundamental assumption

we make in our theatre and therefore we create barriers for those who identify as “other.” And too often we are drawn to those seemingly “like” us excluding the “others” who have the potential to challenge and enrich our perspectives and our narratives.

Most of us live in a town, city, province, country with a dominant paradigm, an individuality that is considered primal, pervasive, standard, the norm. Most of us also inhabit identities that are in one area or another not the dominant or majority characteristics. As performers, artists, and theatre professionals who embrace inclusion and diversity, who can bring vulnerability and openness to the variety of identities among us – we have the opportunity to create a more fluent, natural, and authentic storytelling in our creations. The stage provides a unique place to address the various blind spots, ignorance, and active bigotry within our societies. We, as performers, have the space to deconstruct our own assumptions and open ourselves up to a larger world view, one that actively embraces ideas, however foreign, or “other”. If we can hold our defensive reactions at bay and embrace our curiosity, we have the potential to generate work and community

beyond the social and political limitations of the dominant paradigms and identities under which we live.

In my own company, an Asian-American actor, a cis-gendered female, once complained that the vast majority of the roles she was offered were either as prostitutes or as the character of the “best friend.” In the U.S., a country composed of Indigenous Americans, over four hundred years of slave descendants, and (im)migrants from throughout the world, the plays produced here are still predominantly written by “white” men perpetuating a “white” dominant point of view on the stage. How do we then include “the rest of us” without either succumbing to mere “tokenism”, exclusion, or perpetuating a dominant narrative or stereotype – like those faced by Asian actors? As theatre-makers, these are essential questions to explore.

We can stretch ourselves to include more complex storytelling, and, when we do, we will likely encounter growing pains. When we are identified as part of the dominant group, it is critical to make sure that we make room to explore what it means to be marginalised or in a minority group with those actors and characters among us from those groups. Empathy is key to a functional ensemble. In peeling back the layers of each of our characters, we will find that we share spaces and also opportunities for new understanding. Conflict is inevitable. However uncomfortable, we do not grow unless we come face to face with the limitations of our own perceptions and tackle the meaning of new ideas. But the end goal is that we will become a company open in its perspectives that include a more dynamic and diverse reality to take to our audiences.

The process of inclusion has complications. As a director, I may often be unaware when a particular actor feels isolated or unable to question my decisions or process due to their unique point of view or experience. I am responsible to be open and respectful

of the diverse people and identities in the room and to create a safe space for all the collaborators. I often make it clear that I am aware that I may omit, miscommunicate, misstate something that demonstrates my ignorance and that can be challenging or even hurtful to a company member. I often apologise in advance and invite them to let me know when this happens. I want to learn, though I realise it is not their duty to educate me. If they choose to, I will be respectful and thankful for their guidance in dialogue with them.

Beyond developing my own sensitivity and respect, there is also a responsibility for each company member to “show up” and put themselves and their voices into the mix, however vulnerable that might be. Silence, however justified by past experiences, will undoubtedly limit the creative potential and the authenticity of our work together and our performance. Whether we are talking about a strong female character from a dominant white American perspective, or that of an Asian woman who might deliver strength in a very different way, our work will benefit from the investigation our diversity and inclusion affords us.



Fields of Vision. Other voices, rural places, global stories, IETM Wales 2018, photo: © IETM

When we consider the impact and value of including “others” in our performance companies, it can help to consider these open-ended questions. They require that we listen to and reflect on the answers from each participant:

- *What are the diversities already present among us? Which ones are obvious to the senses and which are not discernable without checking in with the performer?*
- *How do we make the space safe for everyone?*
- *How do we hold space for challenges to dominant assumptions or ideas?*
- *What are the stereotypes we hold around all identities? How can they be challenged?*
- *Do we ask people with a particular identity to speak about their experience rather than operating on presumptions or speculation?*
- *How do we make sure we are not practicing “tokenism” in our inclusion of minority identities? What is the impact of making a specific character/role one identity or another?*
- *Are we reinforcing the dominant paradigm or subverting it? What is our intention? What are the consequences of our choice?*
- *If we have a company or cast of diverse actors from various origins, what do we think about various accents? Do we “white-wash” them by making them the dominant pronunciation or do we embrace the ethnicity of the actor’s voices? To what effect?*
- *Can we incorporate words or phrases from the native languages of the actor/performer? Does it make the piece more or less authentic?*

Considering these questions within our theatres and ensembles can create more trust and safer environments. Yet when conflict arises over our differing perceptions, it is critical to remember that everyone has the right to their perceptions, and no one speaks for all of us.

Sometimes it may feel that we are in gridlock as we struggle to invite someone with challenging beliefs into the space to co-exist with us. Time is our best advocate. Taking time out or away from tense moments, the “rude awakenings,” may allow us to see around or beyond where we are stuck. We must strive to practice patience with ourselves and with each other as we stretch our minds and understanding. We must come back again and again to our own vulnerabilities as we respect the differences that we find in each other.

I am inspired by a theatre that is truly informed by a company of diverse actors who are invited to bring their worldview and experience, no matter how “other”, into the workspace. I am inspired to collaborate with artists to co-create work that stretches beyond each of us, allowing a strong collective narrative to emerge. While the practice of inclusion may challenge our deeply held biases, we will inevitably become free of these chains and commit to a theatre that has the potential to reach more audiences. Our own identities are access points for our curiosity to blossom, starting places for our further investigation into the human

experience. Each step we take toward opening our own perceptions generates new possibilities in our creativity as individual performers and as collectives.

I am excited about my new membership with IETM as an organisation focused on the world of theatre, both in terms of location and artistic expression. As the people of the world migrate in larger and larger numbers, whether through immigration, war, resettlement, displacement due to environmental upheaval, we will all need to develop skills in working across diversities, identities, and abilities. Being part of IETM gives me hope for the future. Historically, artists challenge paradigms that are static and bring a new dynamism to our societies. I look forward to delving into discussions and learning new practices from the broad community of IETM.

“How dare we?” on ‘tipping points’ and empathy

BY JESPER DE NEERGAARD



Other abilities, evolving aesthetics?, IETM Valencia 2016, photo: © Vincent Chartier



Jesper de Neergaard

Since 2011, Jesper de Neergaard is the Artistic Director of the venue and production house ‘Bora Bora – Dance and visual Theatre’ and Bora Bora Residency Centre in Aarhus, Denmark. From 2000 to 2011 he was the Artistic director of Entré Scenen in Aarhus, a venue for mixed performing arts. He is a graduate stage director from the Danish National School of Theatre in Copenhagen and before that, in 1983, he acquired an MA in Prehistoric Archaeology, from the University of Aarhus.

Jesper became a member of IETM in 2002. Bora Bora is also a partner in Aerowaves and in European Dance House Network.

The discussion about inclusion in performing arts has two outer poles (extremes). One is the neoliberalist agenda of ‘more bums in the seats’ resulting in more earnings for the institutions. The other outer pole is audience participation for both social and artistic reasons, and in between, there are a lot of examples of formats and ideas. This discussion has been in focus at several IETM meetings – those in Hull, Milan and Rijeka being the last ones - which resulted in many interesting workshops, reports and essays about the topic which can be found on [IETM website](http://IETMwebsite).

Here I have permitted myself taking in consideration the future demographic changes, mostly because the size of the demographic change calls for a very long time of preparation if we – from where we are now – are to handle a much larger integrational challenge. I am afraid this is external to the art professionals’ conversations on how to share good art with as many as possible. This is more about cultural institutions as potential co-working organisations ethics and ensure human survival. The polarisation of the Western society in two antagonistic poles: the intellectual humanistic and the populist egoistic, is perhaps the greatest danger we face for democracy and for world peace. We have to build bridges however inconvenient it is.

The bigger picture

Human society faces a range of tipping points in climate change, demography, economy and democracy that calls for preparations in the cultural sector for an activist strategy concerning inclusion. Empathy and humanity are the driving forces of inclusion. Empathy and ethics are among the most cherished human traits, which the arts celebrate, foster and/or generate. For the sake of future generations, cultural institutions should be in the front of creating meeting places where people can encounter their differences trying to create empathy as a democratic force.

Right now, societies all around the world and the whole of humanity, face a range of wicked problems – complex problems that are difficult if not impossible to solve, that call for our empathy and high ethical standards if we really want to find solutions.

Climate change is one of those wicked problems, as long as the world politics want to preserve growth in a neoliberal market economy instead of preserving the Earth – or believing we can do both at the same time pushing solutions into the obscure. When climate changes reach their tipping point, chain reactions will

become out of control. Irreversible. The results are unpredictable. One can only guess because scientists just keep being wrong in their scientifically well-founded predictions. And it seems, we cannot avoid a grave situation. One guess is that in the next 20-70 years we can expect migration waves of climate refugees in numbers unprecedented in human history. These masses will claim spots on Earth to live on and these spots will most certainly be in Europe. As xenophobia is on the rise worldwide, clashes between climate refugees and the local population seem inevitable and this tension will sooner or later reach its tipping point and result in violent conflicts, wars.

The term – and the situation – ‘tipping point’ is quite topical, amidst the uncertainty of a future designed by our overexploitation of the Earth’s resources. These tipping points are the ones of power/democracy, economy, migration/integration (as stated above), and culture, after a period of deteriorating cultural policies.

Power, democracy and economy

In his recent book “The West vs. The West”, published in March 2019, Danish journalist and author Rune Lykkeberg states his opinion that the present decline in Western culture and what appears to be a crisis of democracy is a result of the decline of ethical and moral politics after 9/11. From the end of WWII up till then, the Western culture had its “Golden age”, as he calls it. The period of rebuilding the world in the West bound together with unions and alliances, and the ethics of Human Rights: equality, freedom and justice.

According to Lykkeberg, the West began to lose grounds during the Iraqi wars, the war in Afghanistan and the emigration crisis both in Syria and Mexico. From 9/11 till today has been the period of crisis when peoples revolt/vote against the established systems because of the lack of victories and prosperity.

“The West vs. The West”, which is only in Danish so far, provides many intriguing perspectives and conclusions on the state of democracy today. For example, the author suggests that the election of Trump, the Brexit vote, the yellow vests in France etc. are not proving the crisis of democracy, but on the contrary, these events prove the health of democracy because the ‘other side’ also wins and new democratic ‘spaces’ occur.

Rune Lykkeberg’s linking of culture and politics is both clear and evident, and it proves how important culture is in forming political agendas. In my opinion, the relationship between culture and politics is reciprocal. We live in the era of what I call ‘Politainment’: the politician as an entertaining protagonist in a game or a show. We mix the sports, crime-series and 3-second-politics on TV or the social media we follow, and as a result, we tend to vote for the most entertaining politician. The populist political parties say that they just follow the sentiment of the people. This is a self-enforcing system that pushes democracy towards becoming autocracy. It is happening in the USA, Poland, Hungary. To some extent, this also caused Brexit. But on a smaller scale it is happening everywhere!

The decline in ethics and morals is obvious in the economic sector as well. The political response to the crisis following the turn of the millennium, as Lykkeberg points out, has been to give more leeway to the free market. The multinational corporations have become grotesquely gigantic by exploiting cheap labour in poor countries in a new form of imperialism in times when empires seem to be gone long ago. The distribution of wealth has become unbelievably unequal in a world that declares a will to end poverty. Formerly reputable companies, banks and lawyers greedily throw themselves into semi-criminal and wholly criminal enterprises. Treasuries are being robbed by smart businessmen who escape punishment because of a right that an English banker

phrased as “We, who are wiser, have the right to take the money of the less wise when they lie there”.

Of course, one is very naïve to think that all this is new in the world of humans. Yet the sheer scale and growth of it is overwhelming, and reaching the ‘tipping point’ seems inevitable if the blatant injustice of this world continues. As this has happened many times in history, the economic injustice would provoke mass rebellions. Yet those might be rebellions aimed not at the ones who rob us but at the ones who come to our countries, bluntly blaming them in competing for jobs and welfare with the locals and causing the decline...

Integration

Right now, in each of our “first world” countries, we face difficulties in solving the problem of “integration of the newcomers”. In particular, integration of colour and religion fails mostly because the institutional encouragement for these social processes simply does not happen. Many governments and their restrictive immigration policies play a crucial part in the xenophobic climate in Europe today. The idea of “Fortress Europe” creates inhumane refugee and migration camps just outside the borders of Europe. Camps that more than anything resemble extermination camps in order to prevent other people from disturbing our pathetic dream of still increasing wealth and luxury goods. We allow this to happen, thus becoming cynical and showing no sympathy and care for other humans – any species, actually. Some of the political parties in Europe have on their agenda to get rid of the Human Rights responsibilities, so caring will no longer be an obligation under an international convention. They seriously think that plunging ourselves into sanctioned gluttony while the rest of the world burns or drowns is a very good idea.

Inclusion in Performing Arts

We, the arts and culture sector, will have to help build an integrational sentiment in each national and local environment. For the sake of bridging the opposing poles in our societies we, the cultural institutions, and for many reasons first of all performing arts institutions, have to regard as the first and most important task to engage in the integration of the part of the so-called “non-audience” that votes for nationalistic forces, that screams on Facebook, that practices hate speech and is easily manipulated by right-wing propaganda... We should create spaces for empathy. We should arrange face to face meetings between those who show growing intolerance and the groups of people not being tolerated. Not to secure ‘more bums in the seats’. Not to do social work for governments who try to kill two birds with one stone. Not to make people make art. **No, we have to do it for the sake of building empathy. The ability to recognise and understand the feelings of others is what we strive to promote every day on stage anyway.**

Inviting integration opponents to our venues would reek of commercial considerations. We would be offering/selling them our ‘intelligence’/ ‘wisdom’ and our elitist humanism on our ground. It will push them off and firm their misconceptions further. If we want a positive change, we have to be invited by them instead. Before feeling sick from the idea try reading a little further.

Activist projects of curiosity

We have to regard bridging the gap between humanists and xenophobes as a creative process and refer to the xenophobes not as ‘the enemy’ but rather as ordinary humans living in our community. Once you do that, you will see that only a small percentage of them are bullies, while the vast majority are quite normal people who don’t have experiences that challenge their views in positive and constructive ways. That is simply not



Loud silences. Languages, accessibility and cultural hegemony, IETM Milan 2019, photo: © Massimiliano Monnecchi

offered and secured by the neoliberal system. **What is important now is not to focus on converting people to ‘holy humanism’, but try to understand these people whom we actually do not know enough and whom we so superficially tend to look down to. It is almost pure dramaturgy. It is actually empathy.**

Make projects in these people’s homes, in their streets, in their working places, in their field. Do not let them/us alone. Make projects about real estate/economy/ television/ in their area, and they will come. Open up opportunities calling for their experience in life to share with immigrants, and some of them will come. Initiate projects where their lives, thoughts, anxieties and fears are in focus. Create opportunities for people from opposing poles to meet and get to know each other. I’m not talking about participatory therapy, but about respect in giving space. It might evolve to artistic work later. Be prudent and concise. We might go away from the social ‘tipping point’ of our world – or at least we will all tip with open eyes in full action of trying to prevent the fall.

The activism we will have to master is the artistic ‘society-work’ we do outside the contract our institutions have with authorities. I will presume some of it will even be felt like a subversive civil disobedience. Because most of the energy will not be used to create new, paying

audiences for our theatres but to make constructive meetings between people from both sides of the polarised world. Why should we do it then? Who else can and would do it?

And now the moment of truth. As an artistic director of a dance venue in Aarhus, Denmark, I stand almost powerless. Contemporary dance might be the absolute last thing the people we call ‘non-audiences’ would think of engaging in. Actually, to work on this essay, the archaeologist came up in me and put me in charge of a series of deductions that led me further than I liked. But I know now I will have to do something about how to think contemporary dance in a much broader perspective. I will not accept being powerless and do business as usual. I will have to distil out of the very essence in the contemporary dance that communicates to everyone - that includes everyone - who does not only build bridges but fills the gap underneath the bridge. I feel very strong resistance towards contacting racists and xenophobes, but I also understand that I am then a typical creator of the polarisation from my side of the gap. I must find the courage – and the empathy.

Do we dare? Do we dare not to?

A journey towards inclusion and diversity at IETM

BY PIPPA BAILEY



Towards an inclusive culture, IETM Amsterdam 2016, photo: © Vincent Chartier



Pippa Bailey

Pippa Bailey is an independent producer/director based in Sydney Australia.

Pippa is on the board of Theatre Network NSW and works as a consultant with arts organisations to respond to the Climare Emergency. She has been Director/Producer of ChangeFest 2019 in Sydney, Senior Producer at Sydney Festival 2019, Artistic Associate at Barangaroo, was Senior Producer for Performing Lines, a national producing company, 2013-2017. She has acted as creative consultant for various arts organisations including Arts Council England, English Heritage, Musical Theatre Network and the Bureau of Silly Ideas.

IETM member since 2010.

When I attended my first IETM Meeting in 2009 in Bratislava, I felt that I was entering a brave new world. I had been living in the UK for ten years at that time and longed for connection to Europe, because, even as a 'special' member of the EU, that 'united' island nation seemed culturally insular and isolated from its mainland neighbours. The relationship has unravelled since then.

My career as a performing arts worker was forged in Australia. I trained as a performer and then spent time making and touring theatreshows. To make ends meet, I worked as a presenter and producer for the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), a national Government funded broadcaster that is unique in the world because its principal function was and is to provide multilingual and multicultural radio, television and digital media services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society. SBS TV and Radio reflected Australia as a 'salad bowl' of diverse peoples. **Then the notion of salad bowl was replacing the increasingly unpopular 'melting pot', suggesting that we appreciate all the unique cultural ingredients rather than insist on assimilating people to the dominant culture.** This experience at SBS so early in my career has provided a touchstone of vision for a society that is

caring, tolerant and interested in others. It has motivated me to build a career based on these values, travel extensively and seek out many different people and experiences, with the understanding that diversity is strength.

Because my family ties were in the UK and Europe (the Netherlands), I could freely travel from Australia and live in the UK. In London, I worked in gloriously multi-cultural places; I worked alongside Bengali, Somali, Ghanaian, West Indian, Indian, Pakistani, Chinese and many other diverse British people. Living in the UK, I learnt to loathe the class divisions and all the remnants of the Empire, of which I was a living and breathing product. It led me to understand a great deal more about inequality in their 'salad bowl' and my privileged position in that system, which was compounded in my adopted homeland of Australia.

In 2009, the IETM network boasted a wide range of members. Like many newcomers before me, I found my way uneasily into the pattern of meetings and relationships. It was hard, at times, to navigate so many different people and perspectives. I saw myself through new eyes and tripped over my assumptions many times. Over several meetings, I discovered distinctions and

ongoing tensions between people from the different parts of the continent. There was solidarity in shared histories in European regions that I didn't feel a part of, coming from two island nations. Overall, the generosity of spirit and high level of debate was a welcome relief. Each new setting brought a new understanding of shifting political borders and local cultural issues. My respect and understanding grew. I remain inspired by the principles of intercultural exchange, the mobility of artists and their work, shared in informal meeting settings.

In 2010, the network was opened to individual membership and the composition of members started to change. Questions of diversity quickly came bubbling to the surface in both programmed and informal conversations. They were hotly discussed at the [Stockholm Spring plenary meeting](#) entitled 'Whose Story is it?' in 2011 where feminism and racism were key threads. Many of us said at the time that if the fiercely egalitarian Swedes were concerned about these issues then the rest of us should be alarmed. That summer of 2011, following the Stockholm meeting, there was a [terrifying massacre](#) in Norway...

The growing sense of unrest prevailed as other geopolitical forces started to impact all of our conversations. Protest movements such as Arab Spring (2010), Occupy (2012) and Black Lives Matter (2013) were gaining momentum. I visited Lebanon with an [IETM Caravan in 2012](#), generously hosted by the local arts community as the war in Syria was deepening and met artists who had escaped across the border. We met a Palestinian puppeteer living in Beirut on the day the United Nations upgraded Palestine to a non-member observer state, implying a statehood that left him deliriously hopeful and happy. It is these moments when I truly feel the value of being in an international network. Foreigners witnessing his joy somehow validated it and we were all grateful for the connection.

The questions about the role of the performing arts in this changing global landscape were very present in my work and in the projects I chose to work on. I consciously practised the art of raising people's awareness, acutely sensitive to the fact that too many did not get a seat at the table or opportunity to shape their stories. However, at IETM meetings the conversations were rarely about who was NOT in the room or on the stages, and who might be 'excluded' in the different settings of the meetings. Each place was a new context to be explored through the lens of the organisers and fellow participants. The lack of 'inclusion' or perhaps more accurately the lack of people of colour and people with disabilities started to weigh more heavily on the organisation and when raised, it led to uncomfortable conversations. For some IETM members I understand that it's not even a particularly relevant topic in their context. Smaller countries, particularly in the East, without a colonial history are not in the same process of confronting this past now present in the deep inequalities in their communities. At the same time, global issues were shining their lights on all of us, asking that we understand European and 'Western' privilege in a global context.

IETM, known as the Informal European Theatre Meeting, had by that time developed into the International network for the contemporary performing arts, though it retained its acronym. IETM had been undergoing a moment of expansion, looking beyond Europe to the rest of the world. There were new members from Lebanon and Iran who helped to raise awareness about the challenges for artists in these places, bringing welcome Middle Eastern voices into the mix. There was also growing attendance and interest from arts workers and, significantly, funding organisations in Australia, Canada, Japan, and South Korea who saw opportunities for artists and 'market development' through the network. The idea of 'inclusion' has meant a range of agendas. It is strongly concerned with disenfranchised

communities from different cultural backgrounds living within Europe, as well as culturally distinctive non-European travellers flying in and out of meetings from further afield. And while no-one sees themselves as wealthy at IETM, all are competing for the crumbs of cultural budgets in their regions. I am not sure the huge variations of wealth, freedoms and access to resources across such a broad array of countries is always clear to the delegates I have introduced to the network. That knowledge takes time and I've started to believe that the further you fly from, the longer it takes.

In 2013, I returned to live in Australia, from where I joined delegations coming from there to IETM. I learnt of how challenging Indigenous colleagues had found IETM meetings because their history and the position of First Nations had such little context in Europe, outside of the Nordic region. I wanted to support this new need for intercultural exchange into our network.

IETM's journey towards inclusion had well and truly begun by the time we gathered at the [Autumn plenary in Budapest, 2015](#). It followed the summer of 'refugee crisis' and we heard first-hand stories of the refugee crisis as refugees flooded into Hungary by foot. The Government had been slow to respond so citizens took the lead in hosting and supporting these desperate strangers. That summer it is estimated that one million refugees entered Europe from the Middle East and Africa. This meeting was a critical moment for the network, supporting the local Hungarian performing arts scene that was struggling under an increasingly hostile right wing government agenda and sought solidarity from the membership.

At the [Amsterdam Spring Plenary Meeting in 2016](#), a large diverse delegation from the UK was welcomed to a meeting entitled 'Live arts in Digital times', meeting strong voices from different migrant communities in Amsterdam who told stories of colonisation, of systemic racism and addressing the deep prejudices that run through their culture. There was also a strong contingent of UK disabled artists, also assisted by the British Council and a delegation from Africa, rarely seen in our meetings. Here the IETM Secretariat, Advisors and the Board formerly started the process of developing an Inclusion strategy, having difficult conversations and listening carefully to people who are excluded and marginalised in dominant European cultures, endorsed by many concerned members.

In Amsterdam, I joined the Advisory group with regular monthly meetings with other European colleagues. There was a strong understanding from Nan van Houte, the Secretary General of IETM back then, that the network must walk the talk and also diversify its Board and Advisory group. The strategy was developed across several meetings; in Bucharest (Spring Plenary Meeting, 2017) where a young Roma artist raised concerns about the position of Roma people in her country's cultural scene; in Brussels in 2017 ([Autumn Plenary Meeting, 2017](#)) where I had the opportunity to observe the [Associate members meeting](#) which shared so many exciting strategies evolving across the EU and then finally delivered in 2018, in [Porto](#) at the General Assembly. The adopting of the strategy coincided with a difficult moment for the meeting when it also became clear that the venue for the final party was not accessible to disabled delegates. Because after a couple of years of discussion and writing and sharing new ambitions for the network, we were still at the very beginning of this complex and sometimes painful [work](#).

The IETM strategy clearly states:

'We believe that contemporary performing arts can and should represent and serve the whole of society. However, we acknowledge that our field, like all professional sectors, continues to reflect the inequalities that exist in society, where some groups have to struggle more than others at different stages of their careers.'

It is clearly still a work in progress.

Since Porto we have waved a fond farewell to Nan van Houte who gave so much of herself to this challenging work. Now Ása Richardsdóttir is leading the network into brave new territories as we respond to the growing Climate Emergency. And the two 'issues' are related and must be considered together if we are to work together to fix this mess.

Since I joined IETM, so much has changed. I have felt the discomfort of UK colleagues, desperate to connect with Europeans while Brexit chaos reigns. The rise of extremist agendas that seek to further divide our countries and their people. Many are returning to first principles: What kind of world do we want to live in? What role can the arts play?

And at the end of the day, the performing arts cannot fix society, despite all the fabulous dreamers determined to try. We are a microcosm, a reflection of our wider social contexts. We play our part in systemic problems and can also play a part in the solutions. And I know for certain that the greater the range of people involved in these adventures, the better.

Open the door: including the audience in the creative process

BY MATTEO LANFRANCHI



Artistic walk, IETM Hull 2019, photo: © Thomas Arran

In 2007, I founded Effetto Larsen, a company based in Milan, Italy. I started my professional artistic career as a theatre actor, and the company started its activities with original contemporary theatre shows. In only a few years, we had distinguished ourselves for the quality of our work, but the enormous difficulties of the national production system had led us to a severe crisis.

In 2013, I found myself making a radical choice regarding the direction of my company. Born in the theatre, after so many shows, we felt the need to find a different way to relate with the public. To our credit, we had received awards and recognition, but the criticality of the Italian production system created big problems in touring. We couldn't build the deep relationship we wanted with the public, and for those who work in the performing arts, having few opportunities to show their work means emptying their projects of meaning. Without being fully aware of this, driven by a crisis, we were questioning the artist/spectator relationship, looking for a more contemporary way.

The first choice was instinctive: we decided to open our rehearsal room for a few days a month to anyone who wanted to join us. At that time, we were working on STORMO,

a movement-based project on collective intelligence. We hadn't yet developed a precise way to work in a participatory way, but I remember that most of the feedback sounded like "I don't know what we're doing but I want to do it again". So we knew we were on the right track, but there was still a lot to be done. Also, in a short time a small community was formed to follow the project. An unexpected, surprising side effect that had a huge influence on our whole artistic process.

That simple gesture of opening the door had opened up a new world of possibilities for us. Since then, we have involved citizens from the very beginning of the development of our projects; now the public knows that, and knows what to expect from us. We are always very clear in our communication: these are not workshops where something is taught, people will not be entertained, and the sessions are always free. We spent a year and a half developing an effective way to engage the audience, learning from the participants, making them feel listened to.

The greatest lesson we have learned in these years is simple and human: **all human beings want to feel part of something, a need they often fail to satisfy**. In this sense, art can overcome an ancient cliché



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IETM member since 2015.

and prove its undoubted usefulness. Listening to communities, interacting with citizens in the development of projects: the public is an underestimated resource that must be managed with great care.

For some years now, we have been active at an international level with site-specific and participatory art projects, two genres to which we discovered that we belonged only a couple of years after our radical change of direction. Initially, we felt alone in Italy, but through extending our field of action we realised we had become part of a large international family of artists who are interested in relating to the public in a different way.

The kind of projects we do cannot be experienced as a theatre show: the audience is at the centre, and developing a project in this way takes about two years of testing sessions. It is also necessary to find suitable partners, as we no longer propose a simple product, such as a show, but a process, which requires a part of production each time. **This shift – from product to process – is another contemporary feature, which also generates an aesthetic shift. It is no longer just the artist at the centre, but also the network and the quality of the relationships that the process generates.**

After STORMO, we have created four more site-specific and participatory projects over the years:

Mnemosyne (2015), based on the emotional mapping of areas, which started during a residency in Sri Lanka and was then presented in different European contexts;

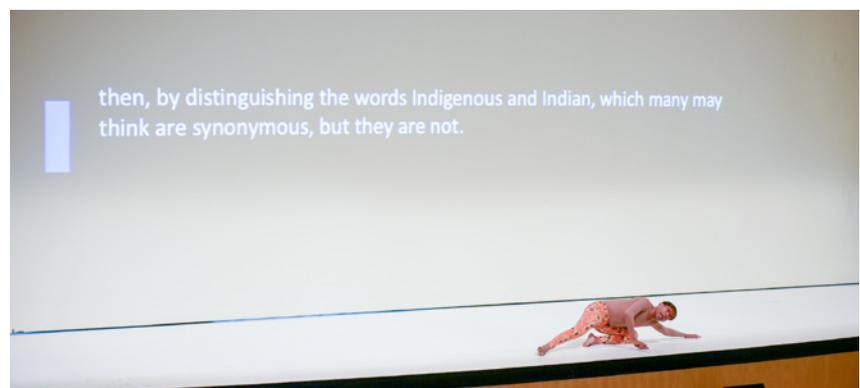
Tracce (2018), a project that investigates the relationship between the identity of an area and that of the people who live there;

After/Dopo (2019), an installation created by the public on the theme of the end of our existence and what remains of us;

and in 2018 I was commissioned to create a new participatory format on the sense of community, entitled The Snowball Effect. As I write, it is still in production, and like several of our other projects it is supported by the European network In Situ.

One aspect that has surprised us is that the more we proceed with our research, the less we are deployed as performers. Most of us come from theatre or dance, but now it's really the audience that is at the centre. We create the conditions for something to happen, for the audience to have a profound experience. And it is the audience that enables us to understand the direction we need to follow during the open work sessions.

Our sessions are open to everyone: over the years our rehearsal room has been visited by people from very different social backgrounds, often without any artistic training or as performers. This is not a problem for us, the fundamental elements to participate are curiosity and openness. For example, for STORMO we had participants aged from 5 to 74, on some occasions even people with disabilities, and we learned with them how to include them. Most of the participants in Milan are Italian; when we do open sessions abroad, the majority is often from the country to which we have brought the project. The biggest workshop we have conducted so far was for about one hundred people, while at the open sessions we have an average of 20 to 30 people.



IETM Porto Plenary Meeting 2018, photo: © Cesar Coriolano



IETM Porto Plenary Meeting 2018, photo: © Cesar Coriolano

Each project represents an enormous learning opportunity: we usually start from an idea of mine, which I propose to the company. I spend a lot of time researching and studying the theme, and my colleagues develop other parts, such as sound, lights or set design. The open sessions allow us to discuss the topic with a lot of people, exchanging experience and skills.

With *STORMO*, for example, we learnt from the public that the project creates internal benchmarks for harmony between people. The quality of listening and attention to others achieved during the sessions generates a memory, a relational pleasure that the participants want to recreate in their lives. In the durational sessions, where the audience can decide whether to just assist or enter the movement, many people came to tell us, "Everyone should have such an experience."

With *After/Dopo*, we have also created space and time to discuss a theme like death, and to listen to the experience and reflections of hundreds of people. When we debuted at *La Strada Festival*, we were certain about the quality of the proposal, but the feedback from the public made us discover another element. Several people asked us to leave the installation open at all times, saying that every community should have a similar activity available at all times.

We have grasped a possibility: contemporary art can create spaces that respond to human needs. Whether they are aggregation, sharing, ritualy, belonging, shared choice, these are fundamental elements for human communities that are often neglected. Several contemporary artists are also active at the political level, and I believe that this trend falls within the same field. As artists we can choose to take responsibility, which is based on creating the conditions for authentic human listening. The only way to do this is to immerse oneself in the world, including the public in our processes, welcoming them as a precious resource.

IETM proved to be a very useful network to discuss these arguments: in 2018, we proposed panels on participatory art, which aroused a lot of interest and attendance, making us understand how the topic was important to many other people. Among the speakers there were other artists, such as Nullo Facchini and Simón Hanukai, festival directors such as Florent Mehmeti, producers such as Judith Knight and Jade Lillie, who presented their experience and their points of view in front of a crowded room. We had an intense dialogue with the participants, and many important topics emerged, such as project ethics, sustainability, authorship, procedures and possible challenges. We proposed a similar format in Munich, and we would like to do it again in the future, to give space to what for us is the contemporary dimension of performing art.

Moreover, the international interest in our way of working, including the public in the artistic process, has allowed us to understand its value. The confrontation with other artists and the debates on the occasion of panels on cultural democracy in Hull and immersive projects in Rijeka have made us discover how many people question the relationship with the public. There are many of us who feel that it is necessary to change the way we do things, and the panorama of possibilities for doing so is rich and continues to grow.