

FRATZ Reflections

Theater o.N. |

The young child as counterpart



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Contents

Juliane Steinmann

**Making way for the youngest. Examples
for artistic settings at FRATZ International 2015**

5

Madeleine Fahl

A journey into the FRATZ Atelier "Now or When"

13

Alicja Morawska-Rubczak

**"flying&falling". Movement communication
between toddlers and adults**

18

Anne Wihstutz

**Children as critical contemporaries –
outsiders or right in the middle?!
Constructions of childhood
Lecture from the FRATZ Symposium**

22

Maike Plath

**The constructive moment of education
Lecture from the FRATZ Symposium**

28

Dagmar Domrös

**The young child as counterpart:
The relation between the conception of
humanity and artistic understanding**

35

Authors

40



Making way for the youngest. Examples for artistic settings at FRATZ International 2015

Juliane Steinmann

FRATZ 2015 has used the main theme “encounters at eye level” and the common threads of all participants to create a net. The main focus is on contact and exchange between artists and children.

“I am not a musical director.” Benoît Sicat

Benoît Sicat and his colleague Nicola Camus move very slowly. They listen: to the sounds of the audience, the room, the surroundings. Before inviting the audience to enter their installation of gnarled, hollow trees, they listen to the expectant silence and to the coincidental rhythms and sounds within. They capture the sounds, they imitate them, repeat them and vary them. They softly begin to make music with sticks. Sicat shoves a branch back and forth on the ground, creating a scratching, abrasive noise. By pulling the wood it squeaks. Silence. Camus beats soft rhythms. There are cautious reactions from the audience in the semi-darkness. Gradually small sticks are handed out to the children sitting in front. Two of them immediately join in the mutual game. The artists hum and make sounds, all four of them strike their sticks and Sicat shoves his instrument over to a kid who beats a rhythm on it, and the stick is gradually pulled back onto stage. The child must decide if he wants to go along or not. The child follows the stick on stage. Then a handful of little sticks is hurled into the audience, and it is obvious that everyone is invited to join in. It takes a while until the mixed audience, also consisting of many adults, can be encouraged to take part. By slowly moving backwards and continuing to hum and play their “instruments,” the two artists lure older and younger people into their “forest.”

For the past twelve years, Benoît Sicat has no longer spoken on stage. The French artist relies on people’s curiosity and body language, as a direct means of communication, using eyes and sound. Within the context of FRATZ 2015, his approach is the best example of a concept that prevails in every step of his performance: In contact with the very young people, who make up the majority of the audience, it breaks down to 100 percent respect for his target group whose reactions are highly individual and hardly artificial.

Back to the forest: Bit by bit the primal shapes of old trees emerge from the darkness, as the light grows less dim. All the trees are equipped with strings, furs, little pieces of tin and wood, which invite the audience to try them out. The game changes.

People of all ages start letting go, beating, tinkling, humming, pounding and rattling, as they increasingly unleash their intensity on the tree instruments. And always at the center of attention: the contact and exchange between artists and children.

The strange tree creatures bear witness to a wild and loud frenzy. At several points the artists redirect the group activity by adding their own powerful impulses. And then they let the group loose again. Towards the end, the two artists are able to subdue the group. “This forest should be very open” says Sicat. The creative racket is over, like dust that has settled. Just two children, self-absorbed, continue to pluck strings. Sicat and Camus now intensify the atmosphere by just humming, clicking their tongues and shaping sounds with their mouths. The sounds of those two children flow into this new music, just as an infant’s crying does. For this one moment the whole group becomes a tightly-knit community. Benoît Sicat says in an interview with the author: “I try to find this moment to make up a tribe. It’s magic. Everything can happen. A child could cry. It’s not a problem. We are together in the forest and enjoy this moment.”

At eye level: day care as a think tank

Artists and children create magic moments together during a performance, as was done here in “Le son de la sève”, the interactive music installation by Sicat at the FRATZ Festival. The central theme for the people in charge of the Theater o.N. – in regard to preparing and carrying out FRATZ 2015 – is to arrange a framework in which exchange and encounter are the primary goals. Dagmar Domrös sums it up: “I am interested in how contact is made, how artistic moments develop, how encounters take place and what means are used for communicating.” And then to dig deeper: “Which approaches help the young child become the defining force of an artistic encounter at eye level?”

Since the pilot project *Theater von Anfang an!* (Theater from the start!) (DAN DROSTE 2009) was carried out, a lot has happened, but many questions still remain unanswered. It has been common practice for quite some time that theaters invite playgroups to help them develop plays, or they go to day care centers to try out their ideas and test the effects. At day care they find out what works, what materials particularly attract children and what story ideas strike children’s interests. There they collect inspirations for their further work. And that is just what Theater o.N. did in 2013



and 2014 with their project “*Große Sprünge*” (“Great Leaps”). At the symposium sponsored by FRATZ 2015 Michael Lurse from HELIOS Theater in Hamm described their positive experiences working with that approach. The day care center becomes a think tank, and little kids are promoted to consultants in demand, because we can assume that their idea of art is incorruptible, based on a natural point of view, which has not been restricted by conventions. Their reactions are considered spontaneous, they are not hampered by politeness. They are appreciated for their valuable feedback (cf. florschütz & döhnert in DAN DROSTE 2009: 18; Melanie Florschütz in an interview with FUCHS 2010).

Little children as defining forces

Contrary to traditional beliefs, the active members of FRATZ assume that just as much can be learned from children as vice versa.

For that to work, it is necessary to look very closely, to listen and to wait and see. The theater educator Cindy Ehrlichmann describes it this way: “The challenge consists of giving a carefully considered impulse and then observing precisely how the children deal with that impulse. That means, taking the reactions as an indicator for the direction in which the mutual game will artistically develop.” In their workshops and offers of encounter, the artists are very frugal with their own ideas, so that the children have a lot of freedom developing activities, observing things and trying things out. They act according to a concept of man that says: Little people are basically competent individuals whose potential can optimally flourish when they react to impulses and experiment with things in an anxiety-free environment based on mutual esteem. Of course, there is an unavoidable gap between people of various ages in regard to their skills and experiences. But that says nothing about the value of experiences.

Concentrating on the bare essentials:

The roles of the theater educators

According to recent findings regarding early childhood education, we can say that very small children already have independent personalities, and they have individual interests regarding their personal development and their desire to discover – which they want to pursue (FRIED et al. 2003, 2006). Working with a target group for whom many things are new, for whom all objects are oversized, whose world is still comprehensible and for whom almost exclusively the next-closest thing, the next-closest sound and the next-closest food is what interests them, then it’s possible and necessary to focus on simple means. Taking that into consideration for the artistic process means asking: “What is interesting? What do kids clearly react to?” Repetition is particularly popular. The principal of cause and effect is especially exciting. The game with the visible and the invisible is a lot of fun and also causes suspense – the fundamental theater element of “acting as if...” is not necessarily known. In theater offerings for the very young the number of stimuli has to be reduced to be able to steer the attentiveness of the audience if only for moments at a time. This process of consolidation to basic ideas and means by designing experimental settings and finding means of expression for a heterogenic audience consisting of young children and adults is highly complex. The theater educators from FRATZ have consciously decided to make small, easily manageable offers without expecting any results. If the offers are accepted, they can take the next little step. Perhaps little interrelated activities are possible, but definitely no stories yet.

The theater educator as confidant

“Here comes theater!” is how Kathleen Rappolt is welcomed at day care. In addition to going to the theater, the encounter program helped everyone prepare for the theater outing at day care

beforehand and work on what was experienced afterwards. children, day care teachers and parents became acquainted with their “theater educator” and through her with “the theater.” Despite the short period of time for the project with very few actual “lessons” and sometimes long periods of time between the “lessons,” the kids were completely with it: They recognized the ball of wool, FRATZ, who started every lesson and ended it. They recognized their “theater educator” – after the first workshop, the kids felt so comfortable with theater that it was much easier to get involved in the encounter workshop with the artist later on. The theater educator accompanied the group as a confidant to the performance, which was particularly helpful, because the educators also had some questions and a need to discuss some things following the theatrical encounters. One educator was so astonished after a performance of “Le son de la sève”:

Educator: “Great, so different. I’ve never experienced anything like it before.”

Rappolt: “Me neither.”

Educator: “And you neither?”

Cindy Ehrlichmann also feels responsible as the go-between for the theater and the educators. It’s in the nature of things that people don’t understand everything in associative theater. Confusion is also possible. But it is very difficult to communicate that beforehand, because it is so abstract. You aren’t strange or uneducated if you don’t understand everything. You have to be able to cope with it. But perhaps it should have been mentioned before going to the theater, in order to avoid frustration. As a theater educator you have to be able to deal with the situation when educators aren’t pleased. After attending “Métamorph’Ose”, one day care worker said: “I thought it was very nice, but I didn’t understand everything. I wonder what the kids are afraid of when they’re afraid... You have to be a bit crazy to do something like that.” What she is referring to are the torn-off dolls’ legs and heads that show up in the performance.

Parent-child encounters: children as “experts”

FRATZ particularly spends afternoons with parents and children in day care centers. With a minimum of means – just newspaper and tape in the case of the Paper Planet workshop – parents were able to understand what they’d experienced in the theater together with their children and the day care teachers. Even though the parents were not necessarily at the festival, they experienced their own child as a little expert. They willingly went along with the theater educator and performed and created things with their children. It was quite evident in their answers to the questionnaire that many parents rarely had the opportunity to do something unusual with their child. Several levels of encounters were possible: “We had the chance to become aware of how the children interact with each other and how other parents interact with their children,” wrote one of the parents. Day care teachers and parents

agree it was crucial: “What great fun the kids had together.” And also after two days of further training, the day care teachers would like to have more ideas: “Those were nice impulses, and that’s what we were hoping for from FRATZ. But how can we go on working with them?”

Theater with small children is theater for adults

Whereas it isn’t essential to Benoît Sicat how old his audience is, Sue Giles from Australia (“Paper Planet”) feels that working together at eye level means that adults sit down and quietly watch the children: “How they make their choices, how they work within the space. They are capable. They have agency. They look after each other.” They are only able to create something new when they are not dependent on the interpretations and world views of the adults. She wants to enable parents to experience the



same and not to determine beforehand what should be done. The defining force for artistic action is completely in the hands of the children: “When you set up an abstract place, there is no obvious point to it. Then the children come in and invent it for you in front of your eyes.” For Sue Giles that is “theater for adults” at its best. And that goes for her installation “Paper Planet” just as much as it goes for her corresponding workshop. At the day care Center in Gottschedstrasse she is welcomed with open arms. The day care teachers have been trained to let the children try things out. They know how to restrain themselves: “We no longer have the feeling we have to decide and steer everything,” says one of them. So that what they do now becomes different from the things they have done in the past – “To me it’s psychomotricity!” says one day care teacher after a workshop with Sue Giles – it is necessary to add artistic ideas to their own work with the children. They would like to continue with more theater projects and trainings after FRATZ.

Full body contact with the arts

It is a bigger challenge for children when Sue Giles and her team decide to make the work of establishing contact more difficult: “We often work with the idea of not engaging with children in the performance. If they want to communicate they have to work very hard to do that.” It is fascinating for her to experience if and how the children deal with the problem, how they overcome this obstacle and what effort they are willing to make to do so. If that happens, the involvement is very intense. With “Paper Planet” which was built as a walk-in installation made of paper trees in the framework of FRATZ, it is very easy to establish contact, it occurs at several levels: In the hallway, when the viewers are put in the mood to experience a different world that awaits them. The stairway is decorated with climbing plants; birds and other creatures inhabit the anteroom. Everything is made of paper and cardboard. Animal sounds can be heard softly wafting over from the adjacent room. A large sign makes adults aware that on “Paper Planet” the children have their say. The big ones can take part and help out, but they shouldn’t make corrections. Other rules can also be seen in writing: Everything can be touched, moved and changed, it is even possible to take something away and to leave something there.

As if traveling through the birth canal, you work your way through a narrow cardboard tunnel into another world. It is cramped, it is warm, the floor feels softer and different than normal. You feel that change from one world to the next with your entire body. Having reached the other side of the canal, adults and kids stand open-mouthed and astonished, as they gaze at the several-meter-high trees and thousands of plants and animals. This primeval forest made of paper and cardboard is immersed in a soft light and atmospherically accentuated by jungle sounds and music. This artificially artistic world is first of all overwhelming, particularly in a visual and auditory way. But the smell is also



strange, and the new feeling under your feet is there to stay. Before the astonishment wears off, human creatures dressed in paper come out with rolls of masking tape and silently ask the participants to start creating their own figures. The group diffuses into the room.

Various performances, various qualities of encounter

Starting at this moment, the experiences in the interactive installation “Paper Planet” are perceived in many different ways. Rappolt says: “It was a big step into another world, on a completely different planet. At first the children were awed. It was so completely different than what they are familiar with. Different in terms of space and different in the way adults usually encounter them.” And despite the kids’ excitement, it was necessary to have the adults there. “First just stand there, look, breathe, come to terms with experiences. Children need various amounts of time. Two children were about to cry. But after a while all the kids loosened up and immersed themselves.” The contact with the audience was effortless. One participant said: “We were actively communicating with each other, we even did some decorating together.” In a short period of time they met many small children and claim: “If the exhibition is able to bring so many people together, then the performers can remain mysterious.”

Cindy Ehrlichmann experiences the groups of parents and kids as “islands of themselves.” The performers were hardly even noticed. “It was difficult for them to make contact.” Another participant described the actions of the performers as “strained.” Inappropriately loud actions were carried out without any organic connection to what the children and their parents created or played. The children weren’t able to react to those actions, and they usually ended up nowhere. On the other hand, these actions led to dynamic interaction during a morning performance with daycare kids. In an interview, the theater educator Rappolt describes wild chase scenes where the artists intensively took part. One child who was quite thrilled said: “We fed the animal. And it had to vomit. And we bugged it with a spider. That was lots of fun.” The unforeseeable nature of group dynamics and atmosphere, especially with the target group of very young children who react spontaneously and according to their immediate needs, requires the utmost in spontaneity and improvising talent among the performers themselves.

The children decide what will happen

Whereas Giles loves chaos and also sees it as an exciting element in her workshops (“Chaos is a very creative state. For children it’s a natural place. It’s like swimming ...”), Hestia Tristani from France (“Métamorf’Ose”) describes her own approach as very well ordered: First of all, silence and listening have to be trained, so that music can be born. “Art is a mixture of creativity, discipline and listening.” In that sense, she defines specific goals for her work

with a children’s group and her role as the impulse giver and controller. Her basic attitude stems from esthetic education, which is traditionally organized in a hierarchical manner. And in this universe, you still have the categories of right and wrong, even though they are subdued. The instructor determines what will happen when. But the children decide if it will happen. Because, the children mainly deal with their own impulses. They work with whatever seems most interesting and plausible. And the decisive aspect within the framework of FRATZ is that Tristani lets them do as they please. For example, she gives them a hummed tone, and a certain movement is generated which she musically converts by following that impulse with her “hang drum.” But she has the children listen carefully and feel what they hear. The mutual game never becomes chaotic.

Fear is a feeling and is part of it

But she also trusts the kids: Her music theater piece “Métamorf’Ose” plays with hide-and-seek, with surprises and objects, which are used in an unusual way. There are moments when children

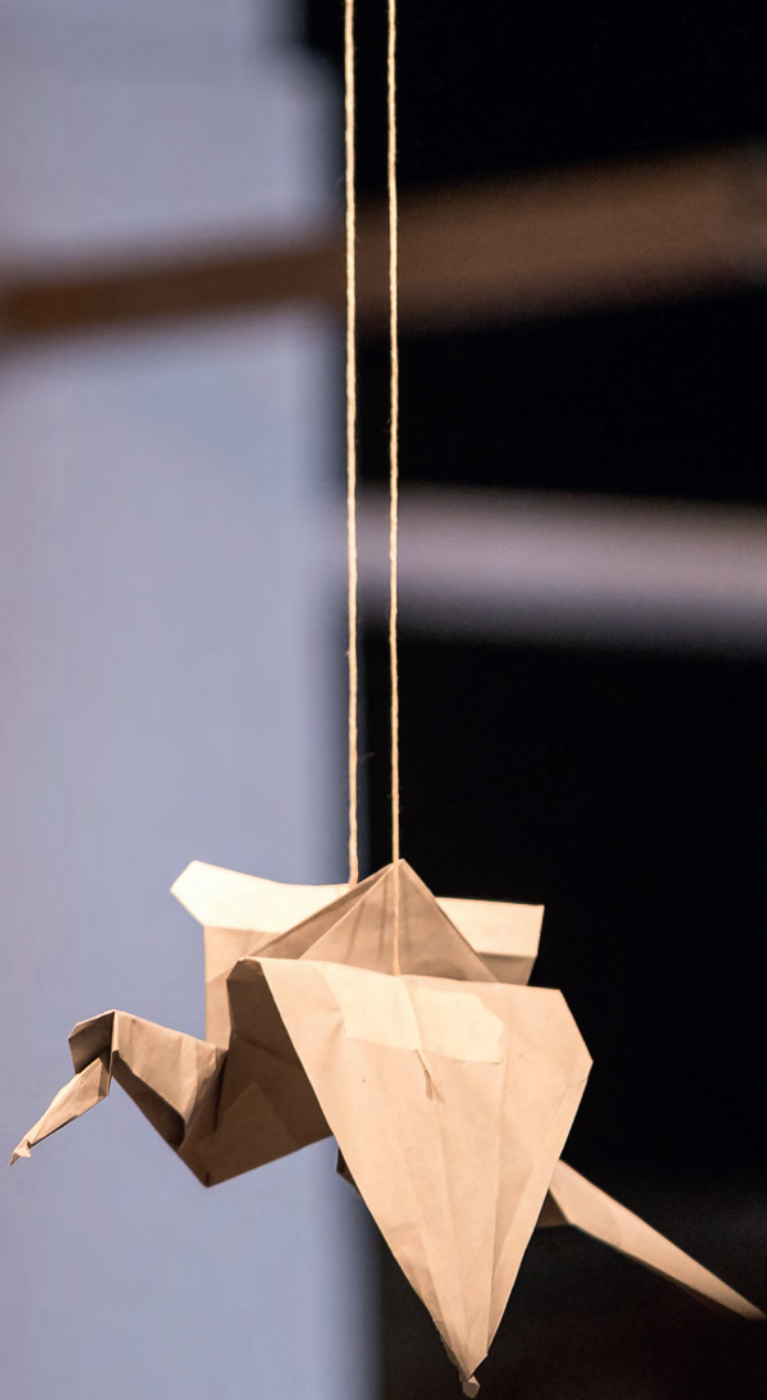




deliberately leave the room and others start to cry. The older children encourage each other and discuss what they see: "That is a person" repeats a four-year-old several times when only the feet and legs of a person can be seen on stage, and that confuses the young participants quite a bit. Fear is part of it, says Tristani, just as much as astonishment, recognition and delight are part of it. She is certain that children can categorize what they see and experience. Domrös confirms this: "It is the right of small children not to want it or to be scared of it." What is important is to discuss your own concept of participation with the parents and the day care teachers: The children were able to leave the room and re-enter, as was needed. Neither children nor adults were required to adhere to a fixed code of conduct. The parent's task can be seen primarily as offering their children a protected space with an open-minded approach where the children can experience and access things on their own and develop their own ideas of the world. Trusting in children as self-motivated learners and researchers serves as the foundation for every type of offer that stimulates the variety of senses and their development. The project FRATZ International with its different levels of encounters has just this in mind.

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A journey into the FRATZ Atelier “Now or When”

Madeleine Fahl

The interdisciplinary atelier “Now or When” was presented by Theater o.N. during the 2015 edition of the festival FRATZ International. Four artists from different fields spent one week with children between the ages of two and five from various daycare groups in Berlin on a journey of discovery.

The shared journey begins after the official welcome in the so-called “room of experience.” This is a specially prepared room whose aesthetic is intended to provide a great deal of space of independent imagination and creative ideas. It is a place for experimentation and trying things out.

“We attempted to create a place where the children felt comfortable expressing themselves.” _Damien, artist

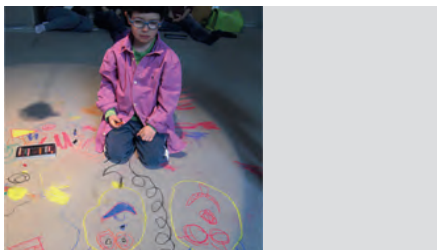
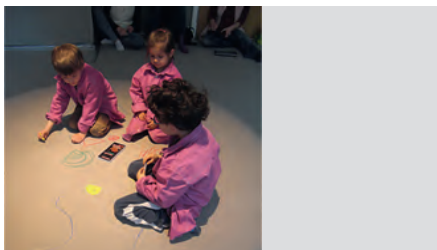
Turning boring gray into all the colors of the rainbow – kids take over the atelier!

After entering the room of experience, the children first form small groups while the teachers position themselves at the edges of the room to observe the children. The floor and walls of the room are covered with lengths of gray cardboard. Meter-long strips are also hung from the ceiling. There are little purple piles on the floor. These are aprons that the children and artists put on to enter into the world of the atelier. The artists help the children to put on the aprons, thus creating the first point of contact between them in the atelier. There is also music. It is being played very quietly in the background by an artist in the corner of the room. Sometimes it consists of a guitar and sometimes only of isolated notes on a xylophone. In addition, there are colors. These take the form of wax crayons that are lying on the floor or being handed out by the artists. And there are gazes. They are taken by the children

and adults alike. Gazes that sweep the room; sizing each other up; questioning glances from both sides asking “And what happens now?” And then it begins. The children and artists begin to draw. Together as well as individually, with everyone working at their own pace.

Damien the artist puts crayons on the ground. The children pounce on them and form two groups in the room. The children begin to draw.

One group of children first sit around their colored crayons – they look and wait. The actress Iduna asks the children if they have a favorite color. They say they do, hesitatingly take a color and continue waiting. The artist Damien draws a circle around them and the children then begin to move through the room like a herd. In doing so, they draw long lines beside themselves. The group



then dissolves and the children take over more space with their pictures.

One girl figures out that the colors rub off on the hands and uses this knowledge to make handprints on the paper.

One boy begins to trace the outline of one of the other boy's feet. A girl watching them says “Good idea” and starts to trace her own feet.

While drawing, the children continually make sounds and noises. They probably

do so to emphasize their own actions or make things come even more alive for themselves.

One boy moves through the room drawing and making noises, as though he were acoustically accompanying his actions. He crawls through the legs of his seated teacher, drawing his path across the floor as he does so. He goes back and forth across this path several times, creating many colored lines on the floor.

Two children interpret their artworks: a police helicopter and a police station. The boy who drew the police helicopter makes siren noises to go along with it.

Mine, yours, ours – interactions between children and adults

In the creative process, the children and adults inspire each other through an equitable giving and taking of impulses to continuously create new works. In these moments of interaction, the participants mutually experience a positive resonance to their actions and share an experience in which something new is created.

The actress Iduna draws by herself and is watched by one of the boys. He asks her: "What could that be?" Iduna answers: "The Easter bunny." Another boy says:



"Flies" and adds on to Iduna's picture. Two other children watch all of this from the sidelines. Iduna tells them that it is a "flying Easter bunny."

Two children discover the xylophone together and play notes on it. The musician



Matthias watches the two of them and incorporates their rhythm into his guitar playing. One of the children moves away and a game comes into being between the child who stays and Matthias where the child first repeatedly makes eye contact with his teacher, as if he wanted to be in her proximity. The child then breaks off this contact and continues to play the xylophone, accompanied by Matthias on guitar. While playing music together, the child now tries to make eye contact with Matthias and a clear connection between the two becomes apparent.

A group of children sit in a circle while Sandy the puppeteer begins to draw flowers around them. The children watch her and a boy tells Sandy that he drew "a green sun that shines like grass."

It becomes clear that the adults ascribe meanings to the children's artworks that sometimes do not match the ideas of the children. Sometimes, the children also feel no need to name what they have created.



A teacher watches a group of children drawing and comments on a girl's picture: "Very nice – a rainbow!" The girl answers: "That's the Fernsehturm!"

A child sits on the floor and draws with great concentration: A teacher leans over from the sidelines and says: "That's great, what is that?" The child answers: "Something beautiful!"

The room as part of the interaction

The aesthetics of the room are also very important for the room of experience since in itself it already has a strong effect on the children and adults. Parallels can be drawn here to the Reggio Emilia approach, in which the design of the room takes on the function of the "third teacher."

"The room of experience has such an extreme design that you enter into a completely new world!" _ Matthias, musician

When entering the room, one of the children exclaims "Ohhh, everything is made out of cardboard here!"

A boy yells: "We can draw on everything that's gray!" and takes over a part of the wall with his crayons. Some of the children follow his lead and also start drawing pictures on the walls.

The setup of the room of experience and the form of interaction this creates leads the artists into a constant exploratory movement between guiding, giving and receiving impulses as well as restraining themselves.



"In the beginning, it was difficult to create a framework without falling into simply doing things for the sake of doing them. That is, providing suggestions in accordance with the room that we then also somehow performed in – at least that's what it felt like." _Sandy, puppeteer

"I found the feeling of giving and taking very strong. Watching what the children were doing and either feeling a response to it or not and then all the same in the sense of intervening, making things that might be transferred into the next room." _Iduna, actress

The following situation shows how difficult it is for some children to enter a room like the room of experience and understanding it in its totality as a surface for their creativity because of how their previous experiences in dealing with art

have shaped them and how strongly these ideas are anchored.

After the children have entered the room and received the crayons, one boy says: "I would like to draw something." An adult responds: "Then go ahead." They boy answers: "But I don't have any paper."

The design of the room also inspires roleplaying in some of the children, who incorporate the materials in the room into their game.

Two children sit facing each other under a strip of cardboard hanging from the ceiling. One of the boys says: "This is Port Horse, please exit on the right." He repeats "exit on the right", stands up and leaves their shelter. Two children join, remain standing briefly in front of the side opening of the strip and then sit and take their places. Another boy joins them while a different child "exits."

Searching for traces ...

Upon the impulse of the artists, the children begin cutting up their artworks with scissors. They also simply tear the objects and figures they have created out of the paper with their bare hands. In



doing so, they encounter the artworks of the children who have previously visited the atelier underneath the layers of paper, which is a tremendous surprise for the children. The children immediately begin to search for other traces.

A group of children has discovered a picture painted by one of the previous groups underneath their pictures. The children now continue to tear down the cardboard. Together, they push the paper aside, squat down and roll it up. Some of them rip pieces out of the paper and throw them into the air. As soon as another picture appears, they comment on it and continue with their search.

In addition, the search for old artworks gives some of the children a lot of pleasure dealing with the material itself.





Some of the children pull the pieces of cardboard along with them. A girl keeps running through the room with a big piece of cardboard. Most of the children begin to collect the cardboard again. A couple of children wrap themselves up in paper, other rip pieces off, throw them away and then jump around.

An artwork is torn out of the cardboard, leaving the cardboard sticking out and pointing upward at some points. A little girl runs over one of these points again and again, whooping with joy, her feet brushing the protruding cardboard.

The journey continues – rediscovering your own work in the room of recollection!

The artworks created are collected by the children and adults in a cardboard bag that is made during the time in the room of experience by the artists from one of the hanging pieces of cardboard. Then the children, usually led by the actress Iduna and one of the figures they have all created, leave the room.



The shared journey leads across slabs of cardboard which symbolize a path of

stones across a stream, through a tunnel into the room of recollection.

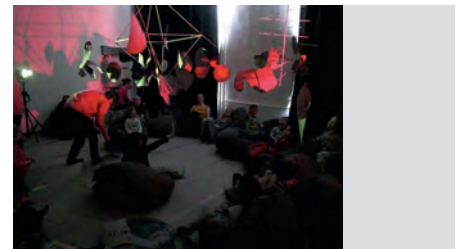
The actress Iduna gives a signal and the children begin to line up behind her. She asks the children what a “billy goat mouse” would sound like and some of the children make a sound in response, “Määäähh.” They all then begin to slowly move in the direction of the door, “määähing” the entire time. The puppeteer Sandy continues to repeat “a billy goat mouse” while Iduna chimes in with “Now gets out of this house.” Iduna opens the door and Sandy, standing at the back of the line, says: “And here is a little stream! Luckily there are stones, even if some of them are really little.” The children balance across the slabs of cardboard in the hall to the tunnel, which leads them into the room of recollection.

The atmosphere in the room of recollection invites visitors to marvel, relax and linger. Inside the room, the nearly complete darkness is only interrupted by individual spots of light. One child says to his teacher that it is like being in a cave. Another answers: “This is like a movie night.” The spotlights illuminate two mobiles that



serve as a moving gallery. On them are the works of art made by the children in the room of experience. They slowly turn in a circle, throwing shadows on the walls.

The objects hang on the mobiles in the room of recollection. As the children enter the room, some of them say “ahh” and “ohh.” They sit on the beanbags. Sandy, the puppeteer, plays the xylophone. A child discovers its picture on the mobile and says “That’s my picture. Hello picture.” Other children point to their pictures and the sentences “Hello picture” or “That’s mine” can be heard throughout the room. Many children sit on their beanbags without saying anything, simply looking up at the spinning mobiles. Later, a child says: “These are all our pictures, guys.”



For some of the children, the connection to their own artwork is so strong that simply stating their ownership is no longer enough. This leads some of the children to create a form of physical proximity to their own artworks.

A girl sits closer to the mobile on her beanbag. She says: "Underneath."

The children sit on their beanbags, looking at the mobiles and it is very quiet in the room. One kid says "Ghosts, ghosts." The children continue to look at their pictures: "The little one is mine", "The big one is mine" and they wave to the pictures. Iduna passes out flashlights. The children use them to shine light on the objects. One boy who initially only pointed to his picture stands up, walks behind his picture and illuminates it with the flashlight. In doing so, he ends up standing directly under the mobile, moving in a circle together with his picture.

A place of relaxation ... and movement!

On the one hand, observing the spinning mobiles and the resulting play between light and shadow as well as the quiet music in the background leads to a relaxing atmosphere for the children as well as the adults.

Two teachers are lying next to each other on two beanbags. One says to the other: "This is nice. I could lie here like this forever."

A girl says: "Clara fell asleep." Another answers: "She's just pretending." Iduna asks: "Who else has fallen asleep?" In response, a child shines her flashlight on the children who have fallen asleep.

On the other hand, the circular movement of the mobiles as well as the experimentation with the flashlights also invites movement.



Damien and three children alternately light up different parts of the body. In addition, they illuminate objects rotating on the mobiles with the flashlights. They continue to illuminate these as well as different parts of the body. While illuminating each other, a kind of game of catch comes into being between the children and they chase each other across the beanbags. While doing so, they shine their flashlights at each other, trying to catch each other with the light. They also begin to play chase physically, chasing each other across the beanbags.

The end of a journey

The shared journey ends in the room of recollection and the children can take the artworks they have made themselves and viewed with pride in the moving gallery, back to the daycare facility with them.

Iduna asks who would like to take their artwork with them. Almost every child wants to, so the objects are again collected in the bag. They carry this as well as "Rudi the Dragon", which the actress Iduna made with some of the children, through the tunnel out of the room.

Outside the room, the children and adults put their shoes and coats back on. The artists help the children with this. Then it is time to say goodbye, wave, turn around one last time and the children leave the atelier, together carrying the bag filled with artworks they have created.

“flying&falling”

Movement communication between toddlers and adults

Alicja Morawska-Rubczak

Toddlers and movement

The awareness of body work, the conceptualism of a created choreography, the ability to focus strongly on mobility and to think in abstract ways, and the creative approach to activity within space, are just some of the elements that make contemporary dance an excellent way of communicating with children.

Children, especially the very youngest, express themselves through movement. The dynamics of the body always come before language and take precedence over words. Focus on the physical and the bodily is a perception shared by children and contemporary dance. Children understand the language of dance in a perfect, almost sensory way. But dance can also help adults to better understand children. At the beginning of their work, the artists and producers of “flying&falling” asked themselves: What is the ‘movement issue’ of childhood that stays with us through adulthood? The answer came immediately: flying is a fantasy activity that is common within the dreams of both children and adults.

Flying is inevitably accompanied by taking tumbles. What rises up is destined to fall down. Tumbling, tripping and falling are all children’s everyday experience, as they take their first steps and explore reality with their whole being. Therefore, these two themes, i.e., flying and falling down, which are so inextricably linked with childhood, became the basis for creative research and the main title of the show.

Creation and participation

The most important area of artistic exploration in “flying&falling” is contemporary dance. It is worth noting that, although this art form is developed to a very high degree in Berlin, still, despite numerous great productions for adults and children, the area of contemporary dance theater for the youngest is almost absent from the artistic map of the city and, more broadly stated, from the entire country. The same is true in Poland, where only one regular arts and education program aimed at families with very young children exists, in Poznań: “Old Brewery New Dance for Kids”. Therefore, two institutions were involved in producing this show: Theater o.N. Berlin (Germany) and Art Stations Foundation in Poznań (Poland), which both understand the needs and expectations of such young audiences very well. They are pioneers in the development of art for the very youngest, and have many

years of experience in leading artistic and educational projects aimed at families with young children, as well as at the youngest arts audiences.



Theater o.N. is an independent organization which has been operating for 35 years in the Prenzlauer Berg district, now called the children’s centre of Berlin. For the past five years, the organization has specialized in creating performances for the youngest audiences, primarily focusing on children aged 2 years old. Their productions cover very diverse themes and forms, making various artistic fields their main medium of expression. These include music – as in “Pling, little thing”, shadow theatre – as in “*Mein... Pfffft*”, variously defined play with spatial forms – as in “Cocoon” or object theater as in “*eine kleine geschichte* | a small story”. Their performances are shown at numerous theater festivals both at home and abroad, including in Japan, Poland, Russia and France. In 2014 the group was honored with the George Tabori Award for its work. Since 2013, the theatre has also been the organizer of “FRATZ International”. The wide-ranging activities of this small theater allow its members to deepen their knowledge and develop the artistic means necessary for creative work with and for very young children.

“Old Brewery New Dance for Kids” is part of one of the most distinctive projects of the Poznań Art Stations Foundation of

Grażyna Kulczyk, called “Old Brewery New Dance”, which is one of the biggest and most significant projects dedicated to contemporary dance in Poland.

“Old Brewery New Dance for Kids” is the first regular project in Poland to focus on the development of contemporary dance for children. Since 2011, within the framework of the project, many dance performances have been presented and a vast number of workshops conducted. The cultural offering is constantly expanding and is directed especially towards families with very young children. Since 2013, workshops and shows have been designed to stimulate a creative approach to art and perceptive skills, in addition to providing a unique opportunity for building new bonds between family members. “Old Brewery New Dance for Kids” breaks down the boundaries between the stage and the audience. It also encourages creativity not only in children, but also, especially, in adults. The classes are offered for the whole family, including expectant mothers and fathers. The concept is to sense a shared energy and set out together on an exciting dancing journey.

Combining the strengths of these two organizations helped create a foundation to develop the idea for a performance unique to both countries. Two dancers appear on stage, both residents of Berlin: the Frenchman Florian Bilbao (concept, choreography) and the Pole Rafał Dziemidok (choreography). Along with a group of German artists, Frank Fierke (set design), Moritz Gagern (music), Sebastian Ellrich (costumes), Klaus Dust (light), and Michael Millar (assistant director), the dancers are accompanied by a team of specialists responsible for the production and content aspects of the performance. This has created a good base for artistic production itself, which from the outset was advised on many levels – by both experts in the field of education, as well as by connoisseurs of theater for the youngest audiences, playwrights and teachers. The fact that artists are open to dialogue and willing to listen to voices coming from different areas made the nine-week rehearsal



period a very valuable experience of exploring the issues and characteristics of art for the youngest audiences, and allowed many people to mutually inspire and learn from each other. The concept of the show, developed by Florian Bilbao, is filled with choreographic content from numerous improvised sessions of the two dancers and from their hours of meetings, based on both physical practices and discussions.

A very important part of the creative process itself was the inclusion of children – the performance’s target audience. Pre-school groups watched subsequent studio performances, as well as fragments of the show, both in the rehearsal space and on the target stage of Theater o.N., and also in their own spaces in the kindergartens. The children’s reactions, their comments and the emotions they displayed during their visits at rehearsals were very important influences for the artists. It’s fair to say that they systematically consulted with the children on their ideas, and analyzed their reactions to specific sequences of choreography. In creating performances for the youngest children, creative work with the audiences themselves is extremely important, for it allows artists to look more closely at the specifics of the recipients, to learn about their needs and their perceptual abilities.

At the same time, it becomes an ideal way to seek a common language, for it is not that artists should, in any way, adapt the message of their adult art to young recipients, but that they wish to find an agreement with them. In this way, the choreography of “flying&falling” not only takes childhood dreams and dilemmas of movement conceptually as a starting point, but also is strongly linked to the world of children at the level of the creative process.

Body and object

The movements of children, the ways that they explore themselves in space, investigate, examine and experience the world, was one of the inspirations for choreographic exploration. How-

ever, what determined the movement of “flying&falling” in a very powerful way was primarily space, i.e. a sprung stage floor, in the form of an inflated air mattress as an object placed in the space. The production designer Frank Fierke, an artist known for creating giant air sculptures, constructed a big pillow filled with air, which eventually filled the playing space of the small Theater o.N. almost 100 percent. Pumped full of air during the entire show, using a special fan, the object is made of a white parachute material characterized by an exceptional plasticity. Through its handling with various means of applied force – pulling, pushing, dragging, touching, moving and even jumping and impacting, – it deforms



in different ways and performs a unique dance. Discovering the qualities of motion in this object and mastering them, putting it through choreographic experiments performed by the dancers involved in the project, was one of the main tasks that the creators of the show set themselves in the early stages of rehearsals. They achieved fascinating, amazing and extremely spectacular results. The pillow started dancing, became one of the partners on stage, surrendered to the creative process. One of the basic elements of drama in the show is the variously constructed relationships with this object. The dancers, looking for its capacities for motion, created a very beautiful study, showing how this sometimes delicate and ethereal object may, at another moment, completely dominate a dancer's tiny body and fully absorb it. It allowed them to build scenic images that become very strongly embedded in one's memory, such as the dance of the pillow itself while the dancers animating it are in its interior, then the fusion of the dancer's body with the pillow, which is like an abdomen – an unnatural extension, and the disruption of human flesh; this alongside hilarious scenes of jumping and bumping into the object, drowning in it, as if in water, until the total “human” domination over the subject, which then passes out its air and can simply be rolled into a ball,

end its life and put it out of the game. All these physically-animated activities have a highly metaphorical meaning and are ambiguous, beautiful and abstract, so that children can easily receive them. They are accompanied by piano music composed by Moritz Gager, graphic and simple in its harmonics – light melodies that quickly catch the listener's ear, and composition passages that fit perfectly into the sequence of rising and falling.

It is key to understanding the meanings of the play to ask, what is the significance of the body in this space, and in contact with the air-filled object? The dominant principle here is that of contrasts that turn out to be not so very obvious. A light and airy construct meets the hard, strong body of a man, and after a while, it appears that that same body can be lively and equally light. A small body is set in contrast with a huge structure, but after a few sequences, the airbag cushion shrinks, and then it is the person who starts to dominate in terms of size. A similar principle can be applied to the bodies of the two dancers. Rafal Dziemidok is a big, one might even say, bulky man, who represents the element of gravity; Florian Bilbao, by contrast, is a short, strongly-built, yet delicate dancer whose movement could initially signify lightness. The interaction between the two dancers in some scenes is focussed on highlighting these contrasts, so that in time, it turns out that a large body has a lot of lightness in itself, and the smaller dancer can fall with even more of a thud and bang than the larger one. The human body is not an unequivocal message, since a multitude of possibilities exist within it, and physical expression has the potential to bring them out.

In a white, very brightly-lit space, the colors of both dancers' costumes are important elements. These colors are not typical – witness the turquoise of Dziemidok's costume and the amaranth of Bilbao's. These vivid, eye-catching colors and the shape and cut of the clothes exposes the bodies of two dancers and break the stereotypes of typical 'male' clothing, showing once again that not only movement, dance, and forms of relationship, but even the shape of costuming, can attempt to redefine masculinity. For most adults, this might be the focus of the show – how many different facets male can have – strong, fast, dynamic and light, while delicate and gentle at the same time. In the context of children's theater, it is fatherhood that is strongly connected with a masculinity context. Presentation of such a diverse image of men allows for an in-depth look at the role of fathers, which today is becoming increasingly important children's lives. The richness of variety and the presence of non-dominating personalities come to the fore. Of course, this content is legible mainly for adults, but we should not forget that these ideas are also very important for children, who read them subconsciously. “flying&falling” is a great performance for kids. The dramaturgy of this show – with all of its shifts in rhythm and action and the presentation of different possibilities with an object – are an excellent base to hold children's attentions. Both the choreography and the performances – in-



cluding the ability to build relationships with audiences using simple humor – brings the stage world very close to the children. Not without significance is also the object's size – in the world of children, so many elements are simply large.

Benefits and development

“flying&falling” is a performance that breaks many barriers and creates ideal conditions for children's new creative exploration, especially in the area of movement expression. Researchers of the theater for the very young stress that the uniqueness of this field lies in giving children the opportunity to experience things completely anew. It is not only a so-called theatrical initiation, but also involves entering new areas of interaction and experience, and creating something for the first time. One could perceive this at the premiere presentation of “flying&falling”. Parents with whom I spoke after the presentations stressed different responses; for example, that their baby was jumping for the first time, or started playing with other kids without parental assistance.

The benefits of engaging children with contemporary dance at a very young age are numerous. The focus on natural expression, as well as free, mobile interaction with the little ones, positively affects their development. On the one hand, it improves motor skills and sensory and psychosomatic development as well. On the other hand, it builds self-confidence and teaches how to communicate with one's body. It also increases freedom of physical expression and the ability to express oneself through movement. It helps children learn to consciously and physically experience the world, and to create relationships and deepen communication through physical engagement.

Children as critical contemporaries – outsiders or right in the middle?! Constructions of childhood

Anne Wihstutz

While preparing for this symposium, I asked myself what should be understood through the title: “The Small Child as Counterpart”?

“Counterpart” – here is where I stumbled. Does that mean “the child from the other side of the street” – that is, at a distance and thus not necessarily within reach, not necessarily standing right next to me? Or does it mean what social psychologists such as George Herbert Mead call “the significant other”? Mead refers to Hegel in his writings, that is, to classical philosophy that examines the lives of human beings and the individual in communities.

The title of the symposium further states that it is exploring the image of humanity and art. According to this, children are perceived as people who are different from us and, from the opposite side, clearly have their own or at least a different perspective on us and our way of life. Aha!

Now the art comes into play. As a sociologist, the relationship between the image of humanity and art is an exciting or unusual question.

My daily work, or, let’s say perspective, from which I view the life of individuals and communities, is oriented around the action of protagonists in structures.

I am interested in how individuals or groups position themselves with regard to one another and to external conditions, how they justify their actions and through which framework conditions their agency is allowed or restricted? And how do these protagonists influence their environment, their relationships and ultimately also the “structures” in which they move?

I am interested in relationships of power: Conditions of relationships that can be investigated as relationships of power if we ask questions like:

- How are decisions actually made, who makes decisions: Who is involved and to what extent? Adults? Children? Adults and children?
- What topics can be discussed, that is, are negotiable and what topics do not appear at all because they are deemed to be so much taken for granted and unquestionable that calling them into question would immediately constitute a scandal or be the pinnacle of impudence. Here you can think about all of the topics that order and structure interpersonal coexistence, and then think about exactly the opposite ... things become absurd very quickly. For example, if a child made the decisions regarding the hiring of personnel for kindergartens and daycare groups.

- What prerequisites have to be arranged and enforced in order to be able to do something, to become involved, to belong, et cetera (for example: Age, language ability, ability to reflect, country of citizenship, amongst others).

And, I am also ultimately interested in the framework conditions through which these relationships, these structures come into being, are maintained, strengthened, called into question or even changed, such as, for example, the relative young German Federal Child Protection Law which strengthens the right of children against parental rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child can also be named as a prominent example.

I understand social relationships as something made by human beings and thus able to be changed by human beings. They change because they are incorporated into economic, political, cultural and probably also ecological processes.

For all of one’s life, the human being endeavors to declare their existence and to find a sense and purpose for all of the found conditions under which they live. While the belief in a life determined by god prevailed in Europe until the Enlightenment and social conditions were accepted as god-given, the Enlightenment in the 16th and 17th centuries called the unchanging nature of conditions into question. The power of the church and the monarchy began to waver also due to the emergent middle class.

Using education, professional and with them economic independence, the social status into which an individual was born into could be elevated and/or left behind – also through marriage.

The credo today is to advance one’s social progress, that is, the retention of status and the improvement of status, through education and performance. Neither the social status of one’s parents, their profession or their assets, nor their cultural or religious background as well as their sexual orientation should have a restrictive effect on their children and their opportunities for education and thus the children’s ability to participate in society. According to this credo, all doors and opportunities for discovering and developing one’s potential should be open to every child. We will see later how this stands.

I have taken an enormous step or leap forward from the clerically and feudally organized society to the current era in Europe. In making this observation, I have unceremoniously leapt over the expansive European colonial policies of the last centuries that deeply changed Europe and the world; I have also refrained from referencing of the events of wars in the 20th century and have

also kept my silence about the European dictators. You will notice that I am referring specifically to Europe – and even here only within certain aspects. We will soon see, not taking conditions outside of Europe into consideration has serious consequences for children in Europe.

It is clear that children have existed in all eras and have also experienced these crises and times of war, grew up, may have had children themselves and in turn passed on experiences and values to their children. This is not groundbreaking knowledge. What is important to me is that we keep in mind the basis from which we regard childhood and children's lives. Our image of childhood and children is not uniform; instead, it is marked historically, socially and in terms of society. Our image of children and how we perceive children is also colored by more-or-less conscious subjective memories of our own childhoods.

Here I come to the **first** thesis of my presentation, upon which I base all of my additional remarks:

There is no such thing as a “natural” childhood.

Childhood and children's lives are structured by laws, regulations, rules and societal norms and provided with values. Johanna Mierendorff has proffered the thesis that in Western welfare states, childhood is the phase in life where the most things are regulated, that is, where there are rules right down to the smallest possible level. In no other phase of life are there so many legal rules with so much exactitude, sometimes right down to the day, then there are for infants, small children, school students and young people. Simply think about the preventive medical checkups and the division into the age groups of 0 – 1 year of age, 1 – 3 years of age and 3 – 6 years of age!

In doing so, the lives of children are subject to special societal observation. On the one hand, this is due to their physical, mental, psychic and emotional development which requires special protection and observation, on the other, this need for protection is a social construct, meaning that it is not preordained, but

instead made by human beings. Think about the economic, legal and political dependency of children which makes them societal outsiders.

My **second** thesis can be derived from the declaration that children represent a vulnerable group with a special status:

It is worth examining the perspective of children, as they are perceived as not-yet fully equal members of society and therefore have a special status.

The places or “spaces”, that we understand today as legitimate abodes are either the family, that is, the social environment, with friends and family, all of whom are known and trusted by the parents. Or educational and care institutions, where the child should be lovingly encouraged to explore their opportunities under pedagogical supervision.

We do not think of the streets, shopping centers, public transportation and other, that is, public spaces, when we think about children, especially small children.

Why then this thesis that it is worth examining the perspective of children? Let me briefly expand upon this consideration.

From the moment of their birth, children are instructed to communicate with their environment so that the environment is aware of their needs and adequately reacts to them, such as the need for love and empathy, nutrition or sleep. It is not only by screaming that infants affect change upon their direct environment.

Children develop their ability to observe early on and attempt to enter into a relationship with their own self through what they observe. They create an image of their own self in this world and develop their own worldview in accordance with their respective radius of experience.

Children do this with and without our assistance. But we can influence how they do this.

Louise Derman Sparks, an education researcher who is known as the founder of the anti-bias approach in the USA, observed that children as early as three years of age perceive discrimination and injury through their environment and demonstrate social conduct that deals with the perceived differences between children in their daycare facilities.

After an excursion, a child asked their day care teacher if they could also become a bus driver. The question surprised the day care teacher, since their pedagogical concept called for all children to be supported as much as possible. She first discerned the background of the question after a lengthy period of consideration: All bus drivers on the excursion had light-colored skin. She did not notice this until she thought about the child's question. The child asking the question had darker skin. On the excursion, the child had not seen any bus drivers with darker skin. (See WAGNER 2011)

Children develop their own answers. They create their own logic for what they see, hear and perceive in general.



Having posed these theses, I would now like to direct my focus on a few selected **living conditions** of children that point toward a different reality of childhood than the general image of Germany would suggest. I am referring to empirical studies that primarily focus on Germany but whose basic statements are certainly also transferable to similarly politically structured social systems. In doing so, I also deal with the significance that these living conditions have for the comfort of children.

Of the approximately 80.5 million inhabitants of Germany, some 16.3 percent are minors (under 18 years of age), according to the most recent population statistics (the 2010 micro census).

The majority of the 12.1 million children live together with two parents who are married to each other. The family forms change over in the long-term perspective. Relationships with children are broken off and formed anew, new siblings and relationship partners of the parents are added. A family does not always live under one roof. Greater than every third child (34 percent of children) under the age of five has a migration background (German Federal Office of Statistics, 2012). This includes children who have parents who came to Germany after 1949, were born as foreigners in Germany or who have at least one parent who was born in Germany but does not have German citizenship or who came to Germany as a foreigner.

The majority of children grow up in economically independent families. Every third family with a single parent (33 percent), however, is dependent upon social benefits in order to make ends meet.

Nearly every fifth child under the age of 18 (18.9 percent) is at risk of poverty.

How children grow up and under what conditions has a direct or indirect effect on their experience of society and the opportunities that this society offers them and those closest to them.

The social scientist Sabine Andresen and the education researcher Klaus Hurrelmann correspondingly determined in the 3rd World Vision Children Study (2013) that 4/5 of the children between the ages of 6 and 11 in Germany are rather and/or very satisfied with their lives. A fifth, however, of the representatively selected 2,000 children report a life of austerity and financial tension. (This number also demonstrates, however, that not all children at risk of poverty experience their lives as impoverished, that is, austere. A multitude of factors play a role in how children experience their lives.)

Children in families from the lowest income segment are truly dependent upon the opportunities of socio-cultural participation in society if they have no opportunities to equally participate over a lengthy period of time. In order to explain this vividly, I would like to present the case of a 13-year-old girl to you who refrains from going to amusement parks with her friends because she does not want to encounter the embarrassing situation of being invited without being able to repay the invitation as she cannot

afford any of the offerings in the amusement park. In speaking of her, I also think of the kindergarten student who is invited to birthday parties by other children but never goes because their foster family does not have enough money to buy a present. This means that these two children are excluded from important social participation opportunities for children.

What does this mean for children? What do children think when they are asked about their lives in this society? This is exactly what Andresen and Hurrelmann have investigated for the third time on behalf of World Vision. This time, they specifically asked "How fair is our world" and meant Germany with this.

For the 6-11-year olds, **fairness primarily meant participation** and experiencing self-efficacy or agency. Even if the rights of children that are written in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Book Eight of the German Social Welfare Code, Child and Youth Welfare, are important, what especially matters for children is to be seen and heard in their everyday relationships and within their environment, to know that their point of view is taken seriously and to participate in order to ultimately be able to do something.

Children feel most comfortable within their families (in comparison with school or other places, such as during recreational activities). In families, they feel the most accepted and the greatest sense of belonging, embedded within a relationship context of being with each other and for each other. Within families, it is especially the mother (60 percent) whom children feel see and hear them; fathers rank lower than mothers with 41 percent.

In terms of **a sense of comfort within the family**, it is not of primary importance to children who spends the most time with them, but instead that adult members of the family are attentive to the needs of the children and observe their perspective.

For children, and not only for them, it is **being perceived by significant other human beings** that is critical for their sense of comfort.

In our own explorative research at TU Berlin on the work activities of children, we have been able to determine that children bring themselves into their activity or "work" in the community. They want to be useful, provide support or relief. They do this both because they perceive themselves to be associated, such as in the family in order to grant relief to the single, working mother (according to a 10-year-old boy) or in the case of chronically ill parents, by responsibly taking care of themselves and their younger siblings. They also do this by assuming responsibility outside of the family, such as on the farm, and proving themselves to be responsible. (WIHSTUTZ 2009)

With this, I come to the **third** thesis of my presentation: **children are right in the middle of things.**

As good observers, children perceive our actions, our ways of expressing our feelings and then attempt to deal with them from their own perspectives.

They observe, for example, that some families live in apartments with very little space, they see that some children go to the movies and other children do not wear brand-named clothing, that they have not ever been on a vacation or that their father does not exchange a single word with their teacher. They attempt to explain these various impressions to themselves and to combine them into an overall image. And to find a space for themselves within it.

Andresen and Hurrelmann state that children do not only relate their sense of comfort and their experience of justice to themselves.

For example, an 11-year-old boy wishes “that everyone has enough to eat, that everyone lives in freedom, can go to school, that there is no poverty, that there are not so many rich people who do not give back” (ANDRESEN/HURRELMANN 2013).

Children identify with this society and wish for a more just world in which all people have the same access. This is where we adults are challenged since children are observers; we are being observed by the small child in how we deal ourselves with injustice!

The World Vision Children Study found that 44 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 11 regularly or occasionally experienced discrimination in their everyday life.

Poor children especially, that is, children from families with very low incomes (68 percent) as well as children with a migration background and children from single parent homes (51 percent) reported occasional or regular experiences of discrimination in their everyday lives. Children from families with many children are also discriminated against (ANDRESEN/HURRELMANN 2013).

In daycare facilities, children experience discrimination because their first language is not German. Instead of recognizing multilingualism in children as a resource and a strength, extra German instruction is offered and with it these children are treated differently. In a certain sense, they are set apart.

They experience exclusion or being set apart due to their health or religion, as can be seen in these statements by children:

- “I don’t want to sit next to him, he talks weird!”
- “Boys can’t play, only girls!”
- “No, I don’t want to hold her hand, she’s black!”
- “Eww, he eats pork! He’s going to hell!”
- “I’m not going to invite a disabled kid to my birthday party!”
- “They’re kissing, they’re gay!”
- “You’re not going to make it into preschool. You can’t speak German.”

(WAGNER 2011)

Children who are made “others” due to their skin color or the place of birth of their parents and ask themselves whether they actually belong at all – as in the case mentioned, where a child asks if it is even possible to become a bus driver because they have never seen a bus driver with darker skin before.



Human beings experience discrimination when they are reduced to a single feature. Currently, the media is reporting almost exclusively about “refugees.” In this manner of reporting, I miss the perception of the people behind this term, their experiences, their abilities, their knowledge and their skills. Those who have fled are reduced to the status of (unwanted) supplicants and, in the best case, victims.

Children who experience discrimination and degradation themselves or within their peer group need people who strengthen them in their abilities, perceive and respect their interests and support them in having their rights perceived.

And now I come to the end of my presentation.

At the beginning, I spoke about how I found the question about the relationship about an image of humanity and an understanding of art exciting. In art, I see opportunities to support children in processing and coming to terms with their experiences.

Art provides opportunities for processing and opportunities for expressing what one has experienced. With this, one’s subjective experience is “brought into the world.” Or, to take up the image of the symposium again: Art transports one’s own voice into the world of one’s counterpart. As such, it contains a huge potential to bring about change.

From my point of view, the challenge rests in finding a way to listen to this voice, this expression of experience, something that must be done by us adults, parents, politicians, artists, journalists as well as by other children in order to strengthen and mutually support children.

As a sociologist, I was asked to look at the lives of children and the experiences of children. I have spoken to you as a “counterpart”, that is, from another perspective, and perhaps even from a great remove. Now, I would like to invite you to come into conversation with each other from your perspective.

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The constructive moment of education

Maike Plath

We live in a world of massive social changes. Our educational practices, however, are still aligned with norms that no longer correspond to our complex world. In our schools, the greatest available resource is lying fallow: The individual will to create, existing within multitudes of children and youth of the most diverse social and cultural backgrounds. In order to educate them to be democratically capable, independent and creative designers of their futures, and ours, we need creative people. People whose point of reference has never been the norms – but rather, the questions. We need artists! Together with teachers, they can clear the path to an educational system worthy of the future, that puts its reliance in the autonomy and the potential of each individual person.

Resistance and aversion to the subject of education

Whenever education is discussed, resistances come up. Each one of us has a personal tale of hardship or a history of problems on the topic of school. Almost nobody can stand to hear any further promises of salvation, let alone about new “reforms.”

In my view, the exasperation in our reaction to the topic of education has to do with the intuitive fear of heteronomy and of powerlessness: One is at the mercy of a situation over which one has only limited control. Many then develop an attitude of: One just has to get through it somehow. I believe that this intuitive dread has a justified cause – and that we should get to the source of it.

Thesis

My assertion is that, in our schools, masses of potential are lying fallow (among youth as well as among teachers), because the existing structures block autonomy and with it, the individual resources of each person. However, exactly therein lies our greatest chance for innovation.

Autonomy

The term autonomy (from ancient Greek **αὐτονομία**, *autonomía*, “self-reliance, self-sufficiency,” from **αὐτός**, *autós*, “self” and **νόμος**, *nómos*, “law”) is used to describe a condition of self-sufficiency, self-determination, independence, self-governance or freedom of choice. In idealistic philosophy, it is the ability to conceive of oneself as a free being and to act according to this freedom.

Self-will

Self-will is a wonderful word. It holds a great power within it. Sadly, these days, far too few are ever encouraged to follow their self-will. With that, the thwarting of possible potential has already begun. For self-will is the starting point of every process of learning and creating. When it is prevented, the greatest source of motivation is dead: intrinsic motivation. Only a person whose self-will is acknowledged can make self-will possible for others. For this reason, educators must also discover their self-will and be allowed to follow it. Self-will is conceded to artists. It is not conceded to teachers. If teachers were allowed to be “artists,” in the sense of creators and discoverers of their profession, education could become vibrant again.

Education is currently like learning to read notes without music

Our educational system at the moment is like music lessons, in which one only learns to read the notes but can never hear nor play the music, let alone compose it oneself. Education, for us, is learning to read notes without music. Children are promised that this will happen “later at some point.” Exactly what will happen at this later point, however, remains completely unimaginable due to the purely theoretical musical instruction. And by that token, incidentally, nothing can happen later either ... It is much more likely that learning notes without music will continue for a whole lifetime.

The origin of the will to learn and create

The will to learn and to create something arises from an innermost personal impulse. It arises from the self. A human being perceives something, is unsettled by it and rubs against this perception, against this feeling of discomfort or against this object.

From this develops a personal question, a personal interest. When one is allowed to follow one’s very own interest, then out of this personal motivation develops a condition of querying and experimenting. Along the way, experience-based knowledge is formed. Out of this results insight.

This insight is then provided with a term, with an interpretation. The person selects from the huge number of fragmentary “facts” on the data that has resulted from the personal question, and generates personal meaning from them. From this arise new questions once again, and so on ad infinitum.

If we allow this process to happen, then it leads continuously

to the development of new phases of experimentation, new experiential knowledge, new understandings that we can also always relate back to ourselves. In this way, we come to a comprehensive knowledge of ourselves in friction with the world. The various terminologies and interpretations that we take on are always in a state of development and can be changed – on the basis of new insights. A process of lifelong learning could be described in this way.

This is personally effective education.

We ourselves, and that which we hold to be our identity, are based on the sum of that which we perceive and recognize. We are constantly re-organizing the facts of the world, they are always in motion, and lead to ever-new, more complex interpretations. The more we are incited to personal questions and experiments, the more eager we are to experience the new, and the more comprehensive and complex our knowledge becomes.

From the sum of all these experiences and interpretations of meaning that we undertake, the construct of our biography forms itself. The more autonomously we are allowed to shape this process of growth, the more we experience ourselves in this world as self-determined, and the more competent we become as co-agents in shaping and changing this world.

That is exactly what is needed in the curricula: individual, personally effective learning. Everyone needs an individual approach, a personal path. That would be inclusion.

Currently, however, in our schools as well as in our society as a whole, external control rules: The self is not allowed to formulate personal questions. Rather, it is confronted with pre-formulated terminologies and interpretations that it should “get through,” which are considered valid to achieve.

Learning content (basically a dead term) is pre-established and the self must propel itself toward it, somewhat artificially and with force, no matter whether or not it can establish a personal connection to the content.

At school, learning content and learning goals are givens, and the pupil knows: If I don’t “get through” this, I’ll get a bad mark. The premise is fixed that an ideal learning goal exists, and that this can be evaluated with a mark of 1. All variations from that result are evaluated as “less good,” as deficient.

This goes for the educators as well. Developing and offering their own methods and possibilities out of the sheer joy and expert knowledge of their subjects (originating from their own selves), which could give meaning to their professional calling, is not permitted to them.

They may not consider: How would I like to design my lessons so that my pupils can find their own points of entry into this exciting subject or topic area? – Instead, they know from the very start: I have to design my lessons in such a way that I can evaluate the pupils’ results according to a scale. Naturally, this leads immediately to constriction and anxiety: the educator is afraid

that everything will get out of hand and will no longer be able to get back under control, that is, will not be able to be evaluated. Therefore, the educator also has to keep to the narrow, externally-determined tracks of the standards and the pre-formulated concepts. Educators MUST prohibit the autonomy and self-will of their pupils.

Only the mind, only the capability of human beings for imagination, is endless. The mind can always come up with something new, whereas the fixed norm is already obsolete and thus no longer adequate.

Yet we can only make use of this constructive moment of education, if people can only hold onto the capacity and the desire for imagination. This has its origin, once again, in self-will.

Naiveté or necessity?

That our education system could be much better and fairer is beyond question. Yet one is still always “shot down” with the argument, stated in an exasperated tone, that this ideal is so naive. Really? Is it naive? Or is it necessary? That it could be necessary is suggested, firstly, by the fact that economic and demographic developments call for other forms of thinking, and second, by the fact that the issue of “immigration” requires a change in thinking in the direction of diversity and pluralism.

Constructivist teaching principles

Example: On the subject of “news reports,” we could work through assignments in a workbook, or with the help of worksheet questionnaires (the question-developing approach). For this, we would theoretically have to prepare 27 different worksheets for 27 different pupils. This is absurd – especially if, afterwards, we must also evaluate the results “individually” within our current school system.

We could also take field trip with the pupils to a news editing room, speak with the editors on site, and have the young learners observe and describe the processes in the editing room and then design great posters about the results (the educational reform approach).

However, we could also let the pupils create and carry out their own news program. This would be constructive teaching (constructivist approach). When the pupils exchange knowledge among themselves and develop a common body of information and procedures and communicate with each other with increasing sophistication, then all of them are also working within a connectivist approach (networked and interlinked).

The educators become in no way superfluous through this approach. On the contrary. If this form of instruction is to function, teachers must have a mastery in and a love for their subject fields, must have mastery in and love for their topics and must be practiced experts in relating and communicating, in order to motivate, accompany and challenge the pupils individually. For in

order to learn and further develop one's self, each child needs individual stimuli, friction, responsive attention and constant fresh challenges. This requires a trustful relationship to a responsible person – an educator who acts as a mentor.

If inclusion is ever to succeed in the schools, we will need educators as creative companion guides in learning, who have the competencies described above as well as constructivist, participative teaching concepts – in the sense of experimental “fields of play.”

Contrast between school and the world in 2015

We have long known that constructivist learning requires utterly different conditions from those that are currently the norm in our school system. In particular, the contrast between school and the world actually existing outside it should make us skeptical, at the very least: The generation that will shape our future spends the crucial years of its youth within a system that is based on the thought patterns of the previous century.

Schools a century ago

When we compare our society today with that of the year 1914 (one hundred years ago), it becomes obvious that every area relevant to society has changed massively: Medicine, technology, communications. Yet our educational system stands in stark contrast to this: Schools today look essentially the same as they did in 1914. Classrooms, desks with chairs and a teacher's lectern at the front. Instruction organized by subject in 45- or 90-minute formats, passing bells in between lessons. Other than a few computers and the replacement of the blackboard with a smartboard, little has changed, compared with, for example, the developmental arc from the gramophone player to iTunes.

The supposed aim of the schools of a century ago was to prepare pupils to function in the given societal structures. Punctuality, diligence and, above all, obedience were core goals of education. Terms such as independent thinking, autonomy and self-empowerment played no role at all in a school context. Quite the opposite: young people were to learn to conform themselves and to function – not to call the world into question.

The meaning and the task of education today

Education means delving deeply into content, taking a position in relationship to oneself and one's personal context in this world and in this way, gaining the ability to formulate independent questions. One of the most important tasks of education is to give youth the capability for a critical consciousness. The capability, for example, to determine fact from opinion, is indispensable in an increasingly fragmented and digitalised environment, in which singular attributions of meaning are impossible. At a time when knowledge is accessible to everyone everywhere, it's not the amassing of knowledge that is becoming a resource for the future,

but rather, a conscious and critical interaction with the flood of information and alleged facts.

The societal-political relevance of autonomy for education

Strengthening children's self-will is one of our most urgent tasks for societal reasons, as well. This is why:

Only those who have been reinforced within their own selves are able to handle and productively receive the Other – if we want the uphold the positive forces of a free, democratic world, we must educate our children for the ability to deal with diversity.

The world must be experienced from the perspective of difference, starting from a foundation of feeling secure within one's own identity. For only then is it also possible for us to constantly negotiate our own identity anew and to develop it further.

“When we observe the world from the perspective of difference and thus, in a certain sense, create it, we realist a truth, that of a single individual, for whom the world seen only from its own perspective remains hidden.” (Alain Badiou)

One of the most pressing problems of our time is the issue of immigration. Simultaneously, also, that of demographic change. Both could influence each other positively. That, however, depends upon our ability as a society to handle diversity.

“It's not a matter of how many people migrate from A to B, but rather, of how much diversity our society can stand.” (Sebastian Klüsener, quoted in *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 12 Issue 14.03.2015, “2013 – Es kommen härtere Jahre”, p. 27)

At the moment, we have only very limited success with this. According to Slavoj Žižek, our democracy is threatened by an increasing relativism. Democracy is no longer being actively lived. The Other and the Alien are somehow “tolerated,” but only in the sense of indifferent sufferance. What is missing is a truly lively and contentious engagement that takes issue with the Other and thereby also allows for the possibility of changing the self. We have accustomed ourselves to always relativising everything,

Tolerance, in the sense of indifference, is dangerous

“There are things that are impossible to bear, ‘I'mpossible-a-supporter’, as Jacques Lacan called it. [...] Tolerance is not the solution to this. What we need is an overriding dominant culture that will direct the way in which subcultures interact. Multiculturalism, with its mutual respect for the sensibilities of the Other, no longer functions when it comes to this ‘impossible-a-supporter’. Strict Muslims find our blasphemous images and our reckless humor which, for us, signify a part of our freedom, impossible to stand. Equally so, Western liberals see practices such as arranged forced marriages or the house arrest of women, which are an active part of some Islamic ob-

servance, impossible to stand. So I say, as a leftist: We have to fight for our own dominant culture. The European dominant culture is the universalism of the Enlightenment, in which individuals treat their own selves as universal. This means that they must be capable of seeing beyond their own uniqueness, of overlooking their particular social, religious or ethnic positions. It is not enough to tolerate each other. We must be able to experience our own cultural identity as something contingent, as something coincidental, something adaptable. [...] Our identity is made up of multiple identities that can exist one after the other and alongside each other [...] The only possibility for autonomy is to uproot, to tear oneself out from the conforming force of the community.

[...] The progress of western democracy lies therein, that it gradually expands the space of universality and thereby, also, diversifies the possibilities of choice among my contingent decisions. [We must make an effort to] ask the questions anew, to reflect upon social conditions for the practice of personal rights to freedom. [...] That is our fight today, Wikileaks included – to keep this public space vibrant [...] The collision of cultures should not be negotiated with a perceived global humanism, but rather with a comprehensive solidarity with those struggling within each culture. Our struggle for liberation [author's note: and autonomy] should be connected to the fight against the caste system in India, to the workers' resistance in China. Everything depends upon this: The fight for the Palestinians and against antisemitism, Wikileaks and Pussy Riot, they are all part of the same struggle. If not, then we might as well just kill ourselves." ("Unsere Trägheit ist die größte Gefahr", Interview with Slavoj Žižek in Spiegel Nr. 12, Issue 14.03.2015, p. 134)

to avoiding clear, "alarming" standpoints. We wave these off and and get cozy inside our "sandcastles." Meanwhile, the trouble spots of this world grow larger all around us.

"Why do we Europeans perceive our awkward situation as a full-blown crisis? I believe it's because we sense that it's not only about capitalism, yes or no, but also about the future of our western democracy. On the horizon, something dark is arising, the first windstorms have already reached us." (Slavoj Žižek, "Unsere Trägheit ist die größte Gefahr", in: Der Spiegel, Nr. 12, Issue 14.03.2015, p. 131)

Since we cannot develop an awareness for ourselves and for our truly personal beliefs and needs, and continually define ourselves through external images, the self is not strong enough to stand the disturbing and the alien. An increasing isolation against the "problems out there" takes place, a withdrawal into the pri-

vate sphere, which, however, only magnifies the problems of our democracy overall.

Vilém Flusser characterizes the "horrificed condition" of migration as a source of creativity. In this sense, we ourselves will have to creep back out of our relativising indifference and "emigrate" – into the perspectives and life environments of others.

Vilém Flusser's thoughts on the "freedom of migrants" could be helpful in this context:

Only those who have been driven out of their (conceptual) homeland, or have voluntarily left it behind, can develop the capacity to deal creatively or inventively with their present situation.

According to Vilém Flusser, migration is a creative situation. The condition of exile can be seen as a call to creative action:

"Exiles have been torn away from their familiar surroundings (or have uprooted themselves). Familiarity is a blanket that covers our circumstances. In the habitual environment, only repressions, but not permanences, can be perceived. To inhabitants, only repressions are informative, and everything permanent is a redundancy for them. In exile, everything is unfamiliar. Exile is an ocean of chaotic information. The lack of redundancies there does not allow this torrent of information to be received as meaningful communications. By its very unfamiliarity, exile is uninhabitable. In order to be able to live there, the information swirling around must first be filtered into meaningful signals, the data must be 'processed'. This is a matter of survival: those who cannot manage the task of processing the data are swallowed in the waves of exile. Processing data is synonymous with an act of creation. The exile must be creative in order not to fall apart." (Vilém Flusser, "Von der Freiheit des Migranten", p. 103 et seqq).

In this era of globalization, it is no longer sufficient to depend on the old familiar tried-and-true and to hold only one's own trusted values to be right. Engaging constructively with the Other has become urgently necessary in order to keep pace with the swift developments of our time and not remain behind on an "island of the clueless."

We can increase the degree of (mental) "alertness" and self-determined participation in this world by standing to face the Other with curiosity (that is, free of value judgements; above all, free of judgements). For the most part, unfortunately, we fail at this. Why is this? According to Vilém Flusser, "Familiarity is a wool blanket that rounds off the corners and muffles the sounds." Only those who have left their homeland or been expelled from it can recognize the banal, that is, the interchangeable, within the supposed importance of a cultural homeland, and arrive at a constructive, open-minded worldview. Letting go of "the need to be right" within long-familiar, culturally agreed-upon mindsets is painful. This is why Flusser speaks of a "horrificed" condition. Only those who have been sitting comfortably can be "jolted out of their skins." Horror is not a pleasant state. But it leads to a new,

expanded view on things. Only those who are displaced, “beside themselves, out of their skins” with horror, can see where and how the others are sitting.

This is why we need a clear picture of who we are and what we want – so that we can bear to have a lively exchange with the Other, can grow from it and can continue to initiate this experience anew with others.

Economic grounds

Ultimately, it is also our economic development that so urgently requires a change in thinking. To support this, a few remarks from Spiegel, Nr. 12, Issue 14.03.2015, p. 23–32:

“Digitization is turning life upside down. How business functions, how we earn our living, how we live together, how we think, learn and feel – all of this is subject to epochal change. [...]

Data is becoming more important than objects.. [...]

Germany’s current economic strength is, in great part, rooted in economic structures that stem from the late 19th century: Automobiles, machinery, chemical, electrical.”

Yet the future will be much less about production.

“Creating will be a more important factor for success in the completely digitalised world economy than producing.”

The fears of many parents that, one day, their children will have no chance for a successful, fulfilling professional life, are totally unfounded in view of our economic and demographic development.

Ten years from now, due to demographic change, there will be more jobs. And new jobs will continue to be created, for which we urgently need people. It will more likely be difficult to meet this demand. Most of all, there will be an increasing need for people who are comprehensively educated, who can think and act independently and creatively. For this reason as well, it is critical that we alter our educational system in the direction of individual learning and autonomy.

Creative learning laboratories

There is a huge need for “real” learning. By this is meant that, in an analog setting – in actual, occurring contexts of relationships – together in a group, one can experience something, try something out, work on something, discuss, test, invent, prove oneself. With unpredictable results. Such (learning) experiences can be created in daily life only in a very limited way by youth themselves.

It can no longer be a matter of standardized knowledge, but about knowledge that can be generated only through one’s own experiences. And that leads, in this vein, to independent thinking. That is exactly what sparks the interest of children and youth right away.

The starting point for learning processes must be the personal interests and questions of young people, for they conceive of the world on the basis of their own individual histories. It is only

here, in the field of tension between one’s own personal and the external sphere, that awareness can arise about the possible independent “meaning” of the world and about potential personal life plans.

Instead of marks and standards as evaluative measures, we need creative learning laboratories

How could this work?

The starting point for a shift in perspective among the adults in our schools has to be a state of exile: a disturbance, a being jolted out of place, in the sense of a confrontation with the Other. However, at the same time, through the enabling of true autonomy, this must immediately bring along this promising attraction: The chance to conceive and design for oneself.

This development could be initiated by artists from outside the schools, if the latter are comprehensively prepared for the situation. We need artistic points of view that use questions as a starting point, if we want to change the rigidified structures and patterns of thinking from the inside out.

For this, artists need to be trained so that in the schools, they don’t simply build “their own sandcastle.” It has to be a matter of engagement and of initiating the communication of encounter, in which all those participating may start right where they are, and join in wherever they are most motivated just then.

This impulse comes from the artists, who – once they have been correspondingly trained – bring disturbances, as well as a culture of inclusive thinking and action, and thus become the initiators of further “infectious recovery.”

That which should happen on a large scale has to start small – in the exchanges from person to person and within our own personal questions. It originates with the artistic perspective, through which the conscious culture of lived inclusion, the principle of individual creating can be conveyed further and further. In this way, teachers, as well as children and youth, can discover the artist within themselves – in the sense of a self-determined construction of the world.

Act! Be the director of your own life: Suggestions for the renewal of the education system

The point of reference for all considerations is this lived experience, that devising “creative launching pads” outside of school-based standards can bring an enormous flood of buried potentials to the surface.

ACT e.V. is an association of artists, teachers and cultural workers. The work of ACT is based upon an inclusive sociopolitical concept that is effective far beyond the framework of school.

Trained artists bring the ACT culture to schools that are open to innovation, that want to get started along the path. In the long term, the conversion of schools into an inclusive, innovative and participatory culture of learning will also mean a simultaneous de-

parture from evaluation marks. This will also make space possible for educators to once again become inventors of their professions and to develop their own participatory “launching ramps” from within their fields.

What is required in order to be able to design constructive, inclusive lessons:

1. A participatory methodical approach, in the sense of a diverse “field of play” or “launching pad” and
2. An appreciative culture of diversity, oriented toward strengths, that is established through the artists’ professional formation of relationships and communication and can then (in the best ideal case) be lived out by everyone else.

On the foundation of the questioning, artistic perspective, the ACT artists first design a participatory “launching pad” for individual creation and reflection processes – based on the principle of the “theatrical mixing console.”

Concretely, this means: knowledge is broken down into its separate components, basic founding principles are made visible and systematically, playfully available within larger contexts of content. Out of these endless numbers of possibilities, the young people can continually build and re-combine their own personal learning paths. Along the way, each of their own individual impulses leads to new possibilities for creation and new insights.

In the continuing adult education program “*LernKünste*” “Arts of Learning”, we are now developing, with the cooperation of the Alice Salomon Institute and with funding from the Federal Ministry for Education and Research, the foundations for an applicable program of training.

On the one hand, it deals with a lively culture for the realization of potential, starting with individual persons and moving toward a goal of establishing spaces of mutual appreciation and a communication of encounter. On the other hand, it’s about testing and reflecting upon the participatory concept, using the example of the “theatrical mixing console.” This serves as a founding principle for the invention of one’s own creative and participatory “launching pads” based on this model.

These various approaches, “participatory playing fields” and the ACT culture of enabling, will be taken by the artists into the schools and will be carried out there by the educators and all those involved at the school.

This is how a culture of diversity may arise, that starts within the potential of individuals and continuously enables further personal directions for growth. This is conceived as an overall concept, which means: The teachers, too, begin with the development of their own participatory playing fields at just exactly the point where their inner unrest or their personal potential lies.

The artistic processes formed through participation by these means can be an incentive and a point of reference for the development of their own participatory teaching plans, in other

fields as well. On the basis of this principle, multiple participatory concepts in all other fields of learning can be developed.

Through a participatory, methodical approach (the creative launching ramp) on the one hand, and a lively culture appreciative of diversity on the other, a new social space for encounter can be built, where the otherwise valid, role-specific patterns of behavior can be laid aside and new roles (and ever-renewing, true identities) can be brought into being.

The educator acts within this communication space within the Socratic principle of the “master-pupil relationship:”

“The master learns from the pupil and is changed by this relationship within a process that ideally transforms itself into an exchange. Giving takes place on both sides, as within the labyrinths of love. Thus it is not a matter of transferring knowledge, but rather, of the very process of learning which leads to new insights. Not knowing, to Socrates, means lifelong questioning, lifelong learning, beyond unchanging certainties. This is exactly what is necessary today in a media-saturated environment, in which information is circulated in such dizzying multitudes and is more quickly obsolete than ever before.” (Christine Eichel, Deutschland, deine Lehrer, Munich 2014, p. 44 et seqq.)

Through these means arises a concept of education that enables every single person to find their personal questions, their own biographical points of interest and connection and from there, to set in motion a potent individual process of education.

Therefore, we must not be too greatly concerned: A system already exists, that is already perfectly equal to handle to the incomprehensible complexity of the world: that is the human being itself, with all its endless capacity for imagination – as long as it can recognize and develop its potential.



The young child as counterpart: The relation between the conception of humanity and artistic understanding

Dagmar Domrös

My contribution bears the same title as the FRATZ Symposium 2015. It goes right to the heart of our discussion: What philosophy do we follow at Theater o.N., and how does this express itself in words and in our practice? I would like to address the matter of the title at this point, and to illuminate the terminology in the context of FRATZ. Along the way, I will touch upon the other texts in this volume and ideally, span some conceptual threads connecting them.

Artistic understanding

As the event organizers of FRATZ, we were very surprised that our selections for this year's festival led, in part, to heated discussions among the attending experts in their fields about their respective conceptions of theater. Remarks such as, "But that's not really theater!" could be heard in the foyers of the temporary event locations. Enthusiastic statements about never having experienced such an event before could also be heard, as well as questioning considerations of where the boundaries really run between theater, installations and performance. Our surprise was predominantly due to the fact that categorizing the works into various genres had not been among our guiding criteria in making the selections. What interested us foremost were artistic events in which contact takes place between the artists and their spectators, to an equal degree with the very young and with adults. Contact implies a mutual interest and respect for the other party. As Alicja Morawska-Rubczak describes in her essay on "flying&falling", it's a matter of finding an agreement with the audience. We were searching for productions in which a shared level of dialogue was consistently sought between the performers and the spectators. Refusal to compromise, with regards to the artistic design intentions of the creators, was a high-ranking criterium for the selection. We encountered artists who do not let themselves be limited in their work by supposedly 'child-appropriate' forms, but who are searching continually for openings and for focus in their orientation toward the counterpart facing them – the young child. In their work, they apply the most diverse artistic means in order to make contact: Movement, sculpture, sound and presence in space, games and singing are just a few examples.

Accordingly, the guest productions at FRATZ 2015 were diverse in their formats and in consequence, we did not announce it as a theater festival, but instead as an international festival for very young audiences. Almost all of the invited productions follow

post-dramatic principles and mix several genres and artistic media together. Across the board, all of them eliminate the classic concept of the fourth wall; all of them do without the standards of psychological acting roles and cohesive narrative plots – with the exception of "Krokodil", by Kemerovo Children's and Youth Theater. The set designs do not suggest illusionary or fictitious locations; rather, they create "expanded spaces of possibility" (Andrzej Wirth, as quoted in Steinmann 2015, see page 10 of this volume): accessible, walk-through installations in the case of "Paper Planet" (Australia) or "Le son de la sève" (France); a moving spatial installation with an inflated object in "flying&falling" (Germany/Poland); a set design that integrates the audience into the scenic situation in "Adams Welt" (Germany/Austria); an open, experimental arrangement that makes all theatrical devices visible and open to scrutiny, as in "Krokodil" (Russia), and an open and permeable arena stage in "Metamorf'Ose" (France). In all these productions, language is used quite sparingly, and when it does appear, then mostly with an emphasis on the qualities of its sounds, and less, or not at all, on a semantic level. Juliane Steinmann asked spectators who had just seen the presentations to characterize what had taken place. Their answers, along with as the artists' own subheadings, reveal a spectrum of newly invented and newly combined forms of presentation: interactive ambulatorium, spectacle vivant, installation with trees ("Le son de la sève"), music theater, music-, material- and movement piece ("Metamorf'Ose"), dance performance in poetic images ("flying&falling"), interactive space installation made of paper ("Paper Planet"), ensemble production, musical journey, fragmentary acted narrative with music ("Adams Welt"). Just one solitary group, the HELIOS Theater, described its production "Spuren" as theater, thereby making use of the classic terminology for the genre (see STEINMANN 2015, pp. 14–15).

The diversity of forms and the international aspect are what make the Festival vibrant. We want to find inspiration in these elements for our own works, we wish to carry out deeper research into this area, we want to create spaces and occasions for the further development of performative formats for the very youngest audiences.

Conception of humanity

This understanding of the arts rests on a concept of human beings which, currently, in cultural education and particularly within

the area of arts and culture for early childhood, has become widely prevalent. Young children are recognized to be complete personalities at full value, capable of educating and developing themselves, if only they are allowed to do so. This is an idea that can be found in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*, so it cannot really be viewed as new. Goethe puts it rather dryly: "Well-born, healthy children bring so much with them; Nature has given each of them everything that is needed in good time and for a lasting while. To develop this is our duty, but more often it develops better on its own."

What exactly does this mean for our work? As artists and as theater educators? In the first place, this conception of human beings becomes evident in our attitude. Of course we, as adults, continue to be the ones who create the frameworks for a shared artistic experience. Nobody would deny that there is a differential in responsibilities and competencies in the relationship between children and adults. In certain aspects, this relationship remains hierarchical. A young child may have the possibility, for example, through crying or passivity, to give expression to a preference not to participate, i.e. in a workshop. The child's freedom to decide is limited, however. In many areas, adults decide for children: The selection of appropriate clothing for the weather and the recognition and prevention of dangers fall indisputably in the adults' areas of responsibility. Planning the daily schedule and choosing what and when to eat are border areas, in which – depending on the child-raising concept – a child may have a right to decide. In certain situations today, children have rights of determination: In many day care centers, they may choose between certain offers and activities or decide for themselves whether or not they will take a midday nap. In families, they are involved in the planning of free-time activities. The Danish educational scholar Japer Juul speaks in his books of a "relationship of equal dignity" between adults and children. This means that the message gets conveyed to children that people of all ages are of equal worth. There is mutual respect for personal dignity and integrity.

The FRATZ team had the intention to create spaces in which the hierarchies could become meaningless, at least as far as possible. Open spaces, in which children and adults could meet each other eye-to-eye, and the children's impulses would count just as much as those of the adults. We adults wanted to learn not to place our aesthetic choices higher than those of children; to listen; to allow children the time they need for exploring and creating; and to withhold ourselves from making our interpretations. As Madeleine Fahl so graphically describes in her journey through the FRATZ atelier, we are all too quick to ascribe interpretations, to press a child's imagination into our adult worldview (see page 11 in this volume). At children's drawing time, sentences like "But a rabbit doesn't really fly" or "An elephant can't be blue" are not all that rare to hear. We catch ourselves in the act of playing out our dominance, interfering, explaining that which needs no explana-

tion, or claiming a supremacy of interpretation that in no way exists. When we say that we strive for an equality of dignity between adults and children, that does not yet mean that we always succeed in putting this ideal into practice.

A successful example of an exchange of equal dignity is the performance "Le son de la sève". Here, it's clear to observe how Benoît Sicat and Nicolas Camus take up exclamations, sounds and rhythms from the children and build them into their acoustic dialogue; there is no right or wrong, the reactions that occur become simply part of the collective sound installation (see STEINMANN in this volume). In the FRATZ atelier, the decision about what should happen with the uniformly grey space is up to the children. Some make line drawings over a large area and combine the act of drawing with movement and noises. Some also tackle the walls. Some draw abstractly, others draw objects.

In spaces like these, there is no educational mandate; rather, there is discovery and experience, shared between the generations. Such encounters can take place between artists on stage and spectators of every age, between artists or theater educators and children in the framework of a workshop or an atelier, or also, between children and their parents in the framework of a child-parent workshop.

The challenge for the adults creating the framework lies within the fact that, to a certain degree, they take on a double role. On the one hand, they conceptualize an encounter and have expectations and ideas about what could happen. They also feel responsible for the "success" of the artistic event. On the other hand, they make contact with the participating children and adults as equal partners, wishing to be open for their reactions and impulses, and must then find acceptance for circumstances in which their offer is understood, used, interpreted and carried out otherwise than they had intended. The legitimate personal creative motivation and the accompanying vulnerability runs parallel, in this case, to the willingness to truly open oneself to and accept the others, to give up creative superiority.

Whereas the dance performance "flying&falling" as well as the productions "Adam's World" and "Crocodile" first let go of their creative dominance only after the performance has ended, in the (playful) so-called epilogue, the more open formats, such as the interactive ambulatorium "Le son de la sève" or the installation "Paper Planet", were permeable from the very start to the input of the audience, which intervened during the events as a co-creative force.

The FRATZ atelier was another attempt to create a space in which adults and children could develop and create in common – and in the end, could be spectators in the space of memory together. In retrospect, this experiment also was characterized by the pendular movements of the artists, between steering and guiding on the one hand, and remaining ready and open to receive on the other. Many encounters happened here, surprising

moments took place. Maybe adults could let themselves become involved in the encounters even more easily, if they didn't have to simultaneously be the ones who prepare and make the offers? Could we also imagine an atelier that would be conceived and designed by one group of artists, and then perceived and experienced, together with the children, by another group? What could children and adults create together if there weren't any goals, specifications or responsibilities on either side?

The open spaces that we create in the framework of the FRATZ Festival and FRATZ encounters are all artistic spaces. FRATZ is an arts festival and, as a result, it happens primarily outside of the institutional frameworks of education. There are points of intersection, however, and we intentionally seek these out. The encounter workshops take place in the day care centers. Smaller free spaces can then emerge there, where, most likely within the limited timeframe of an hour, different standards may apply from those of the normal daily routine of the day care center. The structure of the educational establishment thereby remains untouched. Yet we hope, through our work, to encourage the institutions to create corresponding spaces in other areas as well, and to question existing structures. Raising awareness within the day care centers about the enormous self-educating potential of the children is part of the program. Together with the day care center educators, our partners on site, we are considering what consequences it could have for the sector of early childhood education, if the conception of human beings advocated here were to be fully thought through to its logical conclusion.

Maike Plath, who is involved with development in older children and youth, calls in her contribution for a radical shift in thinking within the school education system. If their potential of children and youth is to be worthily nurtured, they should be encouraged in their self-will, in their will to educate themselves, instead of being pressed into fixed, predetermined learning content and evaluation-marking schematics. Through the program "*LernKünste*" "*Learning Arts*", developed by ACT e.V., she is trying to actively intervene in the school structures, thereby putting into practice at the educational level what the FRATZ encounters at the intersections of art and education are also attempting: The empowerment of even the youngest to find their own forms of expression beyond the norms, the empowerment of children and their parents to participate in (artistic) processes as partners with equal dignity.

Participation

Anne Wihstutz' lecture reminds us, as workers in the arts, that participation is not just relevant predominantly in cultural education. Children want to be involved in all those concerns affecting their lives: at school, in their families, in their circles of friends. To the degree with which they are included and allowed to take part

in co-creating, they feel as if they are taken seriously. They then perceive the world as "fairer." The needs of children for protection is indisputable. Children's protection rights are an achievement. Yet an unconsidered acceptance of societal norms can lead, in some areas, to a refusal of participation that can negatively impact the children affected. Here, Anne Wihstutz uses the example of "child labor." In the Western world, this is proscribed. But in singular cases, it's still worthwhile to look at whether involving a child in work that contributes to the functioning of a family structure might not be right and important for that child. An example would be a child of immigrant parents, who takes over the important task of translating for the parents at the doctor's, or at the offices of the authorities. For this service – even if the task is overwhelming – the child should receive acknowledgement in the first place, not pity. The same holds true for children in complicated household situations, for example, living together with chronically ill parents, who take on responsibility for their younger siblings. Here, too, recognition and support are more appropriate reactions than pity. Support for children in difficult life situations – so reads the wording of the societal obligation. Yet to make this possible, it's necessary to meet children at eye level.

Adults can practice this in artistic contexts. Trusting the discerning ability of children pertains to the arts as well. Would I like to participate? And in what way would I like to take part? As an onlooker? As an active participant? Participation also includes the right not to involve oneself. It is sometimes hard to take, when the offers that we ourselves hold to be valuable and enjoyable are not accepted. This can be seen when theater educators, day care center caretakers, parents or artists put those children who prefer to observe from the sidelines under constant pressure. There is a fine balance between encouragement and coercion. In her evaluation, Juliane Steinmann emphasizes the aspect of taking one's own time. In working for and with very young children, time is an important factor. Entering into a new environment, whether it's a fully decorated stage set or a bare, plain room completely covered with grey paper like the FRATZ atelier, a small child might need a long time to become oriented and open to involvement in the situation. Other children may be immediately ready to take action, to observe or to create. This demands patience and self-restraint on the part of the adults. Otherwise, a budding sprout of interest might be smothered right away.

So if we are serious about the participation of very small children, we will have to plan for plenty of time, and practice restraining ourselves. Of course, the worldview, the power and the creative drive of the adults, all still count in the matter of an encounter. This does not imply trying to "get buddy-buddy" or to "chum up" with children, in the sense of applying "child-appropriate" means and approaches. Restraint might mean: not pushing, not judging too quickly by established standards, not forcing into

ready-made moulds for performance and creation. Perhaps the view and the approach of a child is fresher than that of a creating adult? Does the child willingly take on the suggestion of the artist?

Art opens up spaces for play and experimentation for children and adults, in which possibilities for action and expression can be tried out and tested for their aptitude. This happens in part consciously, in part unconsciously. Along with aesthetic enjoyment, a child can experience taking part and being personally effective in a protected space. Art spaces are experimental set-ups for “real” life out there, but at the same time, they are also real life itself.

We believe that children who experience resonance in an encounter with artists are then encouraged, outside of this model space as well, to make themselves heard, to demand contact and a share of participation. For this reason, it’s important to us, and has been a part of the FRATZ concept from the very start, for the Festival to leave behind the educated middle-class sector of Berlin-Mitte and visit six Berlin districts where we believe, based upon statistics and upon our personal experiences, that fewer possibilities for cultural and social participation for children exist. With our international guests from France, Russia, Poland, Australia and Germany, we had encounters with children in Marzahn-Hellersdorf, Lichtenberg, Neukölln, Pankow, Wedding and Spandau. We got to know them, showed them what we think is “great” – our art –, looked at what they made of it and then, in the best cases, carried it forward together. Additionally, the foreign artists gained insights into the pedagogical concepts of the day care centers and could compare the approaches to those in their homelands. For instance, Hestia Tristani, having been invited to eat lunch together with the children within the framework of her workshop with the partnering day care center in Spandau, made the astonished remark that many of the children had not eaten at all, and that “they were simply let be.” Furthermore, she commented upon the extremely flexible plan for the day for the three- to four-year-olds. At this age, children in France already attend école maternelle, which is equal to our kindergarten preschool.

The young child as counterpart

In her sociological account of images of childhood in our Western world today, Anne Wihstutz considers this title. She asks herself whether counterpart is meant to express distance and strangeness. Or whether the counterpart could be understood in the sense used by George Herbert Mead: as the significant others. By this, Mead means persons in relationships that are important for the child, like father or mother, whose perspective the child takes on at play. In our case, the exchange of roles would be reversed: the adult would take on the perspective of the small child.

Our understanding of the small child as our counterpart contains something of all of these interpretations. My own point

of reference lies in the dialogical principle of Martin Buber’s “I and Thou.” Martin presumes that a human being can only then become completely human and find a personal identity, when encountering a human counterpart, a “Thou.” In his Poetologie, Paul Celen also invokes this “Thou”, the addressee toward whom his poems direct themselves. The arts need these Others, these counterparts, in order to come into being at all. A poem needs its readers, a performance needs its audience, in order to become complete in the moment. In our case, this “Thou” is very young children. They are the audience with whom we want to enter into dialogue. This requires that we recognize the small child as a counterpart in the arts in the first place at all. Unfortunately, in the arts world, this is still not at all a matter of course – which may stem from the fact, on the one hand, that a great volume of theater produced for children in former times did not take children seriously at all. On the other hand, I suspect that there exists a dread of the small child. The small child remains more foreign to us than older children or adults. Small children are harder to “read”, their reactions and perceptions stay hidden from us, when they are not directly expressing extreme fear or joy. Dialogue with the small child requires an intensive involvement, since the semantic language – probably the most-used communicative medium between adults – is not available. In place of it, there are other means which certainly have an equal significance in the arts: Music, sound, the melody of speech, movement, dance, rhythm, image, light, shape, etc. The possibilities for entering into contact with the young child as our counterpart are diverse.

It is even within this very foreignness that we see the greatest artistic potential in the work for this target group. When I make myself strange, as an artist, I place myself into a state of insecurity which makes me alert and sensitive. In this sense, art for and with the very youngest also includes an act of becoming foreign to oneself, a distancing from the worn grooves of aesthetic belief systems and traditional practices. This act enables us to view the role of art in our common life as a society, art’s limitations, its possibilities, and the means that are available to art, and to assess them anew.





Dagmar Domrös *Dramaturg*

Dagmar Domrös studied German and American studies and political science in Hamburg and Massachusetts. She worked as an assistant to the artistic director at the American Place Theatre, NYC and as dramaturg at the *Stadttheater Heidelberg* (2001–2005), where for two years, she was also responsible for dramaturgy at the *Heidelberger Stückemarkt* (international forum for contemporary playwrights and new plays). In Berlin, she was active as a producer and dramaturg for GTA-German Theater Abroad (2005–2008) and *spree-agenten Berlin*. Since 2010, she has been a member of the ensemble of *Theater o.N.* and, as dramaturg, has accompanied the development of many plays for the very youngest. In 2012, together with Vera Strobel, she took over the artistic direction of *Theater o.N.* She serves as part the direction team of the *FRATZ Festival*.



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

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



Alicja Morawska-Rubczak *Theater educator, director, curator and researcher in children's theater for the very young*
Within the scope of her Ph.D. studies at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Alicja Morawska-Rubczak examined the aesthetic of contemporary children’s theater and dance. She is the first scholar to research Polish theater for very young audiences and is internationally active as a lecturer and workshop leader at conferences and festivals. In addition, she has directed five productions for the very young: “*Sleep*” (*Theater Baj*, Warsaw), “*brzUCHO*” (Puppet Theater Wrocław), “*A Tiny Boat*” (Drama Theater C. K. Norwida, Jelenia Góra), “*Horizon*” (Bogusławski Theater, Kalisz) and most recently, “*LAByrin*”, an interactive installation for children aged 0 to 3 (*Opolski Teatr Lalki i Aktora*). She is a member of ITYARN and of the network “Small size”.



Maïke Plath *Author, theater educator and teacher*

Maïke Plath worked from 1998 to 2013 as a theater and German teacher in lower secondary education and, at a secondary school in Berlin-Neukölln, brought many original, biographical theater productions into being. Based upon her long years of theater experience, she developed a participatory, biographical methodology that enables youth to create artistic processes on their own authority and to make their issues publicly visible. In multiple book publications and through her work on the governing board of the federal association *Theater in Schulen (BVTs)* (Theater in the schools), as well as on the jury of the *Theatertreffen der Jugend Berlin (Berliner Festspiele)* (Youth Theater Convention Berlin) and through teaching appointments, she advocates for theater instruction as a most powerful means of education. She serves currently as the artistic director of youth theater projects at Heimathafen Neukölln and on the board of ACT e. V. Berlin. Since 2014, Maïke Plath has been responsible for the conception and execution of the BMBF (Federal Ministry of Education and Research) continuing education program “LernKünste” (Learning Arts), in cooperation with the Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin.



Juliane Steinmann *Freelance cultural and theater educator*

Juliane Steinmann has been awarded the nation-wide “MIXED UP” Prize several times already for her collaborative projects in cultural education. She studied in Hildesheim, created the division of youth theater/theater education at the *Hildesheimer Theater* and founded the *Theaterpädagogisches Zentrum Hildesheim (TPZ)*. From 2009 to 2014 she principally taught at the HAWK University of Applied Sciences and Arts at Hildesheim, in the degree programs of social work and childhood pedagogy. She evaluated the Berlin projects *TUKI – Theater und Kita* (day care centers) (2012–2014) and *FRATZ International 2015*. In various publications, such as *IXYPSILONZETT*, she has published scholarly articles on theater with young children. Juliane Steinmann is also a systemic counselor and a tai chi trainer.



Prof. Dr. Anne Wihstutz *Sociologist and social worker/social work educator*

Anne Wihstutz is professor of sociology at the *Evangelische Hochschule Berlin* and a qualified social worker/social work educator. Her subjects of interest include children’s participation in the family and in educational institutions, children’s rights, and social spaces. From a perspective based in inequality theory, she researches and publishes on children’s power to act, and specifically, on the agency of young caretakers. Along with her teaching post in the degree course of childhood pedagogy, she is active in continuing education work with early childhood educators and in counseling. Anne Wihstutz has long been associated with the Berlin children’s and youth theater *GRIPS* and has served within various forums as a scholarly expert.

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