

Episode 5 with Tanja Diers

Heightened attention

Introduction

Today's performative encounter is with my colleague Tanja Diers from Copenhagen, a dramaturge, and a PhD fellow here at the Malmö Theatre Academy. Tanja is expanding her practice as a dramaturge and in her research with the title *Who cares?* she is looking at an extended practice of listening as an artistic method. In Tanja's current practice she invites everyday experts to the stage with their stories and experiences.

Summary

Tanja concluded our conversation emphasising the need to be seen. In her practice her participants have an opportunity to be seen on the stage, with their stories, experiences, and concerns. They are being recognised for who they are. The performative encounter is empowering to them and so is the process that has been designed as an encounter between two groups of people: the professional singers and the former inmates, an encounter between worlds. Here the two groups are mirroring each other, seen by each other. In my practice there is no stage as such. Instead, the guests and their experiences are placed in the centre and the whole situation constitutes an inner stage seen by the guest who both generates the work and witnesses it. Through interviews with the guests of *No Show*, a solitary performance in a stranger's home, I have learned that being seen and cared for makes the guests give into the work and thus increases the chance for transformative experience. A significant moment in *No Show* was when the guests found their own name at the dinner table, together with the names of the hosts. The guests feel seen and cared for, and this allows them to let go of their defence system, making them more receptive to the experience.

We talked more about safe spaces, ethics, and trust. I felt that we did not resolve the questions about exposing real people as a material for art, but Tanja mentioned a

few key factors that can create a safe space for participants, guests, and performers: Paying attention to different needs, being flexible, being transparent and to practice care. After talking to Tanja, it is only natural to add listening as a prefix to other items on the list.

When talking about the performativity of performative encounters Tanja mentions heightened attention as what makes something a performance and here, she took as an example an encounter between her students and the city of Malmö. She describes how you create a frame from where things really stick out, a moment of heightened attention. I would call this an enchantment, a concept many scholars have written about, and Gigi Argyropoulou mentioned previously in this series. Gigi used different words about tilting the view and connected it to social architecture and the need to queer spaces in order to cut through the codes connected to it and she also talked about mixing reality and imagination in order to create new ideas. Here Tanja is talking about a more subtle way of tilting the view, a practice that is internal and involves enhancing the awareness. I believe that both are describing variations of what Erika Fischer Lichte calls re-enchantment of the world in her book *Transformative Power of Performance* - something that grants you a new perspective on existence. Before I have mentioned Jane Bennett and Timothy Morton as scholars that have dealt with the enchantment of the everyday. On these ideas I rest my work – what Tanja talks about as a moment of heightened attention I would call my practice – a place that is only separated from real life by a thin membrane.