

From therapeutic processes to empathic theatre: Can talking about your self on stage be a tool to enable social change?

Or: Why I needed to write my self before I could be myself.

*"Started thinkin' am I stupid to be funny
over things that's been hauntin' me all my life?"
(Lil Nas X, DON'T WANT IT)*

*"You can't force a story that doesn't want to be told."
(Eileen Myles, Chelsea Girls)*

*"Sei Mensch. Schreibe als Mensch."
(Kübra Gümüşay, Sprache und Sein)*

*"You have to turn shit to sugar."
(Idil Baydar)*

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TRIGGERWARNING:

mentioning of discrimination, sexual trauma, addiction

Intro. *To begin with I want to say, that all these things are already changed and invalid. There is no certainty at all because this is partly based on my own memory. So, for my brain, this is a moment in time, as many others that will follow - it will disappear from direct approachability. But maybe, just maybe it'll leave a trace in the liminal parts of your frontal cortex. Or not at all. Thank you for your time anyway. :)*

In this essay I am trying to narrate my own artistic process: from "therapeutic" methods and approaches of text creation, which put personal storytelling to the foreground, either by writing yourself or co-writing in collective processes, towards "empathic" pieces of theatre or performance art that transcend to the political from the personal. Because I work in an ephemeral art form, the performative, my shows can't be really captured. There is video recording (but that's never the real thing), I do have the texts for the shows I have written, and I do have some of the audio recordings that were made in rehearsals (but who listens to those). They are not ordered for an investigation, they are in chaos, so that at one point I can stumble upon them again and be inspired (a story I like to tell myself). Instead of on evidence, I choose to rely on my own memory, really dwell in it, in the moments that re-appear when I think about the two words "therapeutic" and "empathic", that have been following me around, for sure since I started working at Maxim Gorki Theater in 2014, but probably even before, with the first two shows I did, from which I definitely remember that I desperately wanted to have "real people" talk on stage. Honestly, I am trying to remind myself what happened to me in the last years, what pathways I followed by accidently living.

My tool in this essay is to use the technique of autofictional writing, drawing from my own life and work experience surrounding the topic of writing for stage, while talking around the process of how I came to being on stage, from first talking to myself and with other people, that share my vulnerabilities, towards writing monologues and scenes with them, that then ended up with me being on stage; first as just a mirror image of my self and now even as characters that do not necessarily need to talk about their identity, my identity, but clearly like to do it. I would describe this as, and I hate the word, but still, I will use it, as I'm lacking a different one, "process of empowerment" towards normalization of my self and a deconstruction of norms. Somehow to me, this is what I would define as the beginning of "social change", changing discourse, changing bodies on stage, and therefore changing norms - not only from representation, but in the end also from ways of working and relating in the arts.

I will connect my experiences with scientific models or thoughts: from Erika Fischer Lichte, a book by Yvonne Delhey, Rolf Parr, and Kerstin Wilhelms on autofictional writing and the utopian, as well as the starring thoughts of Kübra Gümüşay in "Sprache und Sein". At the same time, I'll be using other examples of personal biographic story telling like of Alexander Chee, Carmen Maria Machado, or Eileen Myles, I had been stumbling upon to place my ideas in a field of autofictional writing. Additionally, there are some things from popular culture, because why not, they inspire me tons. And most of this essay is irrefutably connected to José Esteban Muñoz.

One could say that I am not working scientifically and - you are right. But also, you are wrong. I am working scientifically with my life, the only difference to science is, that there is no quoting system for sentences that have been said to me or which I said back to others. How should or even could I quote my life, to please scientific standards?

I will continue writing "my self" instead of writing "myself" when talking about aspects of identity building, because as a German native speaker I feel the need to read the clear distinction between a "me" and a "self". As you will see, this "self" is created during the process of writing using myself as a starting point.¹ This is how I came to be:

Past. Recently I met a distinguished, but still very attractive, director, who asked me what I was doing lately, and I told him, "I'm thinking about an essay on autofictional writing", and he said: *"Oh, so you're STILL doing the Yael Ronen stuff?"* To which I said: *"Yes. Instead of using old pieces of text, that nobody cares about anymore, desperately trying to make them at least LOOK relevant by dressing the actors in cute costumes, like YOU, I have been part of group writing processes, which made me realize, that by enabling actors, performers (or anybody really) to write about themselves and perform their ideas and lives, there is possibility in changing the narratives that are brought up by "dominant cultures" - of which you are part of, no matter how LEFT you think you are. So, excuse me for still thinking about that, actually practicing world-making, while you fucking dwell in the past."* Okay. Full disclosure: I didn't say that. I just wish I had. Instead, I mumbled something like "Yes, sure" and walked off to be sad somewhere else, because I felt again, I had done something wrong. Can you relate?

I have always been a character in my own life and looking at myself has been far more interesting than anything I have ever read, that people from "dominant culture"² wrote about people like me: more interesting than most theatre plays I have ever read, most movies I have had seen, up until I was around 21 years old. But also, it wasn't just more interesting, it was also much truer. Since back then, I witnessed a shift in cultural production to the even more personal, that is written by marginalized authors. It is a process that has started before, for sure, but hadn't gotten my attention yet. It's connected to an urgency to enable "social change", because you're actually a group which would profit from that, not like other white, meaning privileged, artists. The thrive of authors from minorized communities in different parts of the world for interpretational sovereignty has been a process of constant revolutionary re-negotiation. This is something that I have experienced in my almost four years as an assistant director at Maxim Gorki Theater. I was working with the "therapist of the directors" Yael Ronen, for most of the time, who included me in the group processes that she had been doing for years, in shows like *"Third Generation"*, *"Common Ground"*, *"The Situation"* or *"Denial"*.³ She was and is still hyped, because she manages (des-)integrative writing for theatre on a never seen and emotional level. Also, she is funny, her shows are sometimes like shows on Netflix (which we can discuss another time, if that's a good thing or not). The way she is working, has influenced the way I work, probably I was drawn to her way of working because I connect to her style of comedy from the beginning, but also fell in love with the actors she works with.

But today, I also have questions concerning her methods and the methods of other writers/directors calling their processes "therapeutic" or even "healing". Because when you are an actor, you also need to know how to save yourself from being used for your story or having your story abused. Worth reading for example is the article of Mateja Meded, one

¹ As you might notice, I additionally jump between "self" and "selves" a lot, as I still can't decide if I'm a singular or plural being. You will have to endure this confusion, too, as I'm unable to also answer this question in the essay. I have to know my limits.

² The German author Max Czollek replaces the term "majority society" with this one to show that it is not a majority, but a culturally dominant group that creates exclusionary mechanisms. See: Czollek, Max: *Gegenwartsbewältigung*. Hanser. 2018.

³ Honestly, just google "Yael Ronen" and "therapist" and you find one thousand articles like this: <https://www.welt.de/kultur/theater/article126969268/Diese-Frau-schickt-uns-alle-in-Theater-Therapie.html>

former actress at Maxim Gorki Theater in Yael Ronen's *"Common Ground"*, on what happened after the opening of the show: *"It took me a long time to become aware of this exploitation - of the stereotyping of my identity as a war survivor; of the re-traumatization that this work caused."*⁴

I can relate to her struggle. I must admit it took me a moment to realize what her actual issue is, because as always - if you are part of a system that works, it takes a moment to step outside and look from there, to gain new perspective. But apart from her, there are many examples: I remember talking to an actor of Milo Rau's show *"Orest in Mossul"* after their opening show in Pfauen in Zürich, probably it was the winter of 2019. We talked about his experience working on it; I was asking a lot of questions towards the process. Full disclosure, I had not enjoyed the show, it had bothered me on many levels. I asked how he had felt, as he was originally from Iraq, where they had had travelled to during the process to visit the city Mossul. As far as I remember he said, he had been very stressed and scared, afraid that he was the only one understanding the danger of the situation going back there. Everything had been fine once they were there, but returning he had troubles sleeping, nightmares, anxiety attacks. But the rehearsal process was over, it seemed like there was nobody involved anymore in his well-being after the show was done.

The casual attitude from directors towards actors in a setting of rehearsing an already existing play, that is "if I like you, we continue working, but if I don't enjoy you, probably won't" doesn't seem to be ethical in this frame of work, when touching the personal, the inside of the people you work with so much more; this is when boundaries are overstepped. And I'm a fan of overstepping boundaries, but together not while one person is in their fixed seat of privilege, dictating who is to do a soul strip next - hello, Falk Richter! Even if the actors, or participants are doing this on their own accord, not understanding the possible consequences - why shouldn't be there more after care? Is it enough to drag the shit up together, but once it's out there you are supposed to handle it alone? Isn't that abusive? Where is your responsibility as a director and writer towards your - either highly praised or completely muted - collaborators? And also: What is with intellectual property of one's personal life?⁵

Still I see using your personal to talk on the political as a great opportunity to look at yourself, at the choices you make, the environment you grew up in and choose to live in, the people you spend time with, the greater political scale you exist in; and to redefine how you relate all of that in your own narrative and actually politicize yourself to act and change these things. And to create your self as well. I think it can be "therapeutic" to use your own life, not sugar coat it, don't change much of it, just to focus on narrating your stories and thoughts - for some people it can be the first time, that the consciously sort their own life story, step back and look at the whole of it. All is good, as long as you do it in a setting that is created through commitment, love, respect, fairness, difference and acceptance - so not only a "therapeutic" and distanced environment, but also one that is already "empathic", by which I mean it

⁴ Meded, Mateja: "Ich habe nirgendwo so viel Rassismus und Sexismus erlebt wie im Theater" Spiegel Online <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/machtmissbrauch-am-theater-ich-habe-nirgendwo-so-viel-rassismus-und-sexismus-erlebt-a-bd883861-c9c5-4dfd-90cf-bb7a9b8fe3ac> Last access: 01.11.2021, 1:15pm

⁵ Here a quote from the former Maxim Gorki Theater actor Mehmet Ateşçi on what he feels was a forced coming out in his first engagement [underlining by me]: "It was very irritating and scary. I didn't have the feeling that anyone had my back or that they were really interested in me as a person, but more in what they could beat out of my soul. I felt like they were digging for gold in my biography. It was great to have a first engagement, but yet also unsettling." in: Emcke, Carolin und Fritzsche, Laura (Interview): »Wir sind schon da« Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin <https://sz-magazin.sueddeutsche.de/kunst/schauspielerinnen-schauspieler-coming-out-89811> Last access: 01.11.2021 2:15pm

connects your own and the experiences of the people you're working with, so you're not alone in opening up. I think the possibility, by working from the selves you are willing to put on display, is to create not only a "therapeutic" space to work in, but also "empathic" theatre and performance work through these processes. Of course it's okay to continue finding meaning in ancient texts, if that's what you like, go off sis! But don't tell me that all I do is navel gazing, when all you do is jerk off on "high culture" (that's just my hurt ego talking, in case you're wondering).

As long as you are willing to stretch the idea of what "therapeutic" means, because most people in theatre are not licensed therapists, not even Yael Ronen, and as long as you don't expect "healing" in the same way as when going to therapy, the relating and connecting that can happen over shared causes, is an immense enrichment in the process itself. But the chances that you are working with someone, who does not care for you, and has no idea how to handle people with fear, issues, traumas, is immense. And if you need therapy or any other sort of help, get it! I personally doubt that your artistic work can solve all your problems. But that is just my opinion. But maybe there are ways to work together, other than in a hierarchy, but on a ground of mutual understanding and care, instead of in a production circle that wants constant movement?

Biography. Do you know the feeling when you find a word, and for a moment the word stands still, and all makes sense? Words give us meaning, possibilities to think about things differently. They give us the possibility to name something, that had been vague and unclear before. The first time this happened to me I must have been six or seven and heard the word GAY for the first time and I was struck and thought: *"Hm, that's interesting, that seems to be connected to me, maybe I should explore THAT."* Very recently I stumbled upon the term "autofictional" and wondered how the hell I could have missed that one for such a long time! It seems to bring very much together what I have been doing for a long time? But what is it?

In *"Inszenierung von Selbst?"* German theater studies writer and scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte considers autobiographical performance as something distinct, bringing together the genre of storytelling (which she attributes to ancient Greek theatre) with that of literary autobiography, under the characteristic that *"for both is fundamental the problem of identity and self."*⁶ The question is whether a stable identity is evoked here, since it is not addressed to a collective as in, say, ancient storytelling, but spoken to a collection of individuals, rather than written as in autobiographic writing. In the example of the artist Rachel Rosenthal, she is working from, it becomes clear that this form of autobiographical performance *"is not about the construction of a self that is identical with itself"*, instead, *"identity appears here rather as the fleeting, only momentarily valid result of performative acts."*⁷

The autobiographical performance can tackle the questions of self and identity, by putting a performance of autobiographical aspects on stage. So much to theory, but what does that have to do with what I do, you might wonder. I wondered the same thing. Because she writes on autobiographical performance. But the term I found was autofictional, even without the performance aspect of it! Bear with me. She goes on to say that *"Rosenthal's performance is not only about problematizing the notion of a stable, self-identical self, but about questioning*

⁶ Fischer-Lichte, Erika: „Inszenierung von Selbst? Zur autobiographischen Performance“, in: Erika Fischer-Lichte, Christian Horn, Isabel Pflug und Matthias Warstat (Hgg.): *Inszenierung von Authentizität*, Tübingen/Basel 2007. S.59 My own translation.

⁷ Ebd. S.61 My own translation.

the occidental concept of self in general. (...) [This conception of autobiographical performance] has been developed since the seventies, primarily - though not exclusively - by artists belonging to groups that tend to be marginalized because of our culture's prevailing notion of I and self: women and homosexual men."⁸ DING DONG! This seems to be one way on using your autobiography on stage. Questioning a status quo of building self and identity, as done by cis-women and gay men historically. So, without noticing I have done something very old-fashioned all along my artistic life, congrats to me! I knew I was cultured! Even though it's not the term autofictional yet, I can relate a lot of the things I do with the proclaimed idea here:

In the moment, that a minoritized person enters the stage, and narrates their autobiography, instead of being "talked about" or "problematized" by "dominant culture", there is a possibility that by sharing other varieties of their selves, they question the building of identity in general, at least in the moment of the performance. I'd like to assume that this performative act goes further, if it is "empathic", if the audience members can relate, they take this home. Still, I feel that the term "autobiographic" is craving for some kind of reality or even "authenticity" of the performative acts, which makes me wonder, if it is even possible to stay true to just one version of your autobiography?

I had been an outsider to the norm, which enables me today to criticize the norm. I had to understand the norm, looking at it through the eyes of my research subject: myself. Therefore, I try to read about things that invest in my self. It's deeply egocentric to do it, but for my writing it's extremely helpful to understand, why I possibly act the way I act. Why my friends are the way we are. (It's also nice to find excuses for my behavior sometimes, too.) It's difficult and sometimes complete bullshit to read on queer topics from a scientific approach, but somehow, like always, there is something to gain: and that is realizing that you were being normal, feeling normal, the whole time. I can't imagine growing up in a world, where writing on queer subjects in science was only done to exoticize and demonize, not only queer people but many other minority groups. Probably I would have had to build my self really just on my own experiences. I would have been lost.

IS there just one version of your self? And which story does this version tell? I'm asking, because I have lived a lot of inauthentic selves in my life, "growing up gay in a straight man's world". I consider myself a shape shifter, or in more classical term, a code-switcher. My "survival" strategy has been to be liked by everyone I meet. I bent over backwards to be wanted, to understand what the other person needs, wanted to say, to think, in order to need, want, think or do the same. I defined and often still define my self by the things I did or do for others, not how I was or am. If I act sleek, do what is expected, if I become invisible, even though I'm shriekingly visible - nobody can hurt me. It was a strategy of "survival", now it's a habit I struggle to get rid of. This is how I, like many queer people, built an inauthentic self as a young person.

Thankfully, it's only the first step in the life of - at least male - queers. Alan Downs, the US-American author of "*Velvet Rage*", calls this first step "*overwhelmed by shame*", something that straight children don't have to go through, because they don't (necessarily) have to hide most of their parts from the world, for which they were not ashamed to begin with, but made to be ashamed. The second step is called "*compensating for shame*", which Downs describes

⁸ Ebd. S.69-70 My own translation.

as you're arriving in a community that accepts you for who you are, but you yourself are still trapped in living inauthentically - probably successful in many things, because you know how to be liked, but deeply unhappy, because you don't know yourself and do things, because you feel they are expected from you. To live authentically, Alan Downs writes, is discovered only by few gay men (he mostly writes about white gay men, a big disappointment in such an insightful book, by the way), by only late(r) in life. It has to do with asking yourself the questions, on who you really are, for you're ready for the last step "*cultivating authenticity*".⁹ This cultivation of authenticity has been a major force in my work, I realized after reading Downs.

Why this need to know more of your self, your group you feel belonging to - or you are made to feel belonging to? Maybe it's about someone, or something, be it an author or an institution acknowledging your existence, not to mock you, but to understand you. Having this from theory is one thing that helped me. The other was queer autobiographic - or better: autofictional - writing in novels, I could relate to. Which often times, also relates to theory (very true in case of the white, ergo privileged, author subjects; guilty as charged!).

There was and is the struggle to find myself in the world. I know it's changing a bit for younger generations, and it makes the old queers pretty mad. Just for fun, let's look at a conversation in "*Will & Grace*", the first US-American TV show with a gay leading character from the 1990s - which was rebooted with the same cast in the 2010s. When Will, a gay man in his fifties, dates a man in the beginning of his twenties, let's see what's his reaction on the "easy" coming out of the younger one:

Will Truman: "That's not a coming out story! How's James Franco supposed to get an Oscar playing that? Is that the "new gay"? You guys grow up in a big happiness bubble?"

The other person: "Isn't that nice?"

Will Truman: "No, it's practically abuse! How is it supposed to get better, if it was always fine?"

The other person: "Are you mad at me because I'm happy?"

Will Truman: "Yes!"¹⁰

I just like a dramatic old fag on TV! And I can relate: I grew up really unhappy from the moment I stepped foot in my first school. Kindergarten was okay, but school became the issue of normatization for me. I had difficulty finding friends, I think. It's also been a long time, but to this day my mother remembers: "*You've been such a happy child, until you came to school, then you changed.*" Dramatic, right? Well, it also felt dramatic, this I remember. The process of understanding that there is a group, a culture, a way of being or belonging for queer people is different than for example for racialized groups; as a sexual or gender minority you usually don't grow up in an environment that is part of this minoritized group you belong to, and therefore a family is not necessarily a safe haven from "dominant culture", like it can be the case when growing up of color in communities of color. When you grow up a sexual or gender minority, your biological family and surrounding is most likely not able to give you a perspective on "your people's history". The a-historical making of queer identities,

⁹ Vgl: Dows, Alan: "The Velvet Rage: Overcoming the Pain of Growing Up Gay in a Straight Man's World" Da Capo Press 2005.

¹⁰ Just watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mznIJS993U> It's a cute scene on aging differences in white gay male communities. Last access: 01.11.2021 4:10pm

the difficulty of relating from small age to a history that means people like you, is another reason, why I like writing about myself: to relate my selves to history and contexts, so that other people can grasp those more easily, when they come and see a show.

Thinking about *"The Velvet Rage"* gives me some kind of comfort, though, that the process of finding my own voice, is on-going and I am not alone in facing this. But that means, during this process, there are a lot of different selves lined up until I reach this point of "authenticity". But this is a possibility of my art creation: I can relate my life towards these processes, "therapy style". Or how the comedian Idil Baydar said to me in a course at HKB this year: *"I only talk about processes I have lived through."* Which I understand as: then, they are relatable. Then they can be perceived empathically from an audience.

"Therapeutic". For clarity: My writing comes from talking. It's the same for me. I do read this text out loud while working on it, and my biggest wish is that wherever and whenever someone would read this text, it could be slightly changed as if I would say it to that person, adjusting and tweaking it in the moment. Writing is not necessarily something done in solitude for me, but something that happens in the moment of self-disclosure when I present my self. In the beginning it had merely an entertaining quality. I started collecting some "stupid sex stories", because the kept re-appearing. But at one point, in Vienna, it must have been 2012 or 2013 I had a meaningful situation with the boyfriend of my friend Paul Spittler, whose name was and still is also Paul: We talked about first sexual awakenings, and we both remembered similar stories of picking up strangers in the city, when being very young. Somehow, something quite similar had happened to both of us.

The fact that I remembered these stories still meant, they were important. And if they were important to me, it meant, they could be important for people like me. And in conclusion, they were important for everyone, because being an outsider in society is not something that only does something with the outsider but also with the emotional capacity of the oppressors. As long as you live in an unjust system, you are never free. And I like to think of my stories as small witnesses to that, with pointing to them I can ask: Why is it this way?

Years later I found the proof for my hunch, that I had not known, I had been looking for: In *"On Remembering the Queer Self: The Impact of Memory, Trauma and Sexuality on Interpersonal Relationships"* Michaela D. E. Meyer side notes important information on sexual identity formation and first sexual encounters. She argues that lesbian identity development is again based on narrative data collected almost exclusively from gay men and is therefore falsified. Going on to state: *"Most recently, Diamond and Savin-Williams (2000) explored this question, and found that women's experience with sexual identity formation significantly differ from men's across four basic dimensions: relational context, first sexual experience, timing between sexual milestones, and sexual identity trajectories. (...) Thus women tend to "discover" their sexual identity through pre-existing relationships and emotional intense connections while men attach sexual identity to explicitly desired or actual sexual acts with other men. As a result, women frequently report that they had their first same-sex contact within a full-fledged romantic relationship in contrast to males who frequently reported having their first same-sex contacts with total strangers."*¹¹ So my feeling of connectedness to my friend Paul's Paul was based on a fact of identity building. In my life I had many moments like

¹¹ [underlining by me] Meyer, Michaela D. E.: "On Remembering the Queer Self: The Impact of Memory, Trauma and Sexuality on Interpersonal Relationships" Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2007. p. 21-22

this, on different parameters of identity building. It's good to understand, that you are not alone.

I remember one of the first rehearsals I had with Jchj V. Dussel for our collective BR*OTHER ISSUES. A lot has changed, since then: I moved to a different city and Jchj focuses on writing rather than performing, also they came out as non-binary, so therefore we are actually not brothers but siblings with issues. Anygay. We had said we want to work together because everyone we met thought we were twins. We had a sense of connection, that went beyond liking RuPaul's Drag Race very much and watching UNHhhh on Youtube.¹² But we couldn't put our fingers in it, yet. So we decided we want to do a web show, but on stage and not actually online, because we're such theatre kids, and probably because we're not Gen Z. We decided to talk about topics on sexualities, whiteness and passivities. Jchj had many ideas, being so free and creative. I myself thought, if I can talk about something it's sex and talking about it is also very interesting (not much has changed since then). I had a feeling that my stories could be fun to tell on stage. I always had liked to put myself in the spotlight with a funny story. Always being the first to make a joke about myself, so that nobody else could hurt me. What was and is funnier than all the random sex stories I already knew? I still don't know!

Doing it. I know I wanted to act for a long time. I even tried to be accepted in acting school, but every audition was a disaster. Because even though I wanted to do it, I didn't know how to. With 17 I went to Ernst Busch and performed some Aischylos with a piece of raw meat in my hand. With 19 went to Hannover and didn't know the words of the monologue. When that didn't work, I wanted to direct, I went to Munich and said, when they asked me why I wanted to direct: *"Because I'm good at it."* Just some examples of my weird try outs. And my audacity.

There was always an obvious way to do things, that I could not go. I don't know why, but sometimes (like now) I think my queerness, something that isn't such a big deal to a lot of queer folks, was and still is such a big deal for me. I couldn't do things properly until I managed to deal with myself, found ways to ground myself, to take time for myself instead of running after other people and their expectations. Maybe actually developing an independent self. Finding that ground within my selves had to do with speaking about myself on stage, instead of directing other people or speaking words of authors, I could not and did not care to relate to. I had to actually voice my experiences, all the fucked up things that I did, I knew people did, or that happened to them.

Maybe I never wanted to learn how things are done, because deep down I actually knew or had an idea how I thought they were supposed to be done? My issue was possibly that I wanted to do it myself, that I had so much more to say than any canon could offer. That's a story I tell myself now, to make my life sound cohesive. But I'm not sure about this version of events. I only know that when I started writing and performing my own texts, I became happier than I had ever been working in the field of arts. I had found a way to deal with myself, when starting to work with Jchj V. Dussel.

I had learned from Yael Ronen that in order to create a space for sharing, you have to share honestly, too. You can't sit and expect people to engage while you watch them. I don't

¹² Just enjoy the insanity of over 150 episodes of two drag queens talking nonsense: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSwY31GMqY0>
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remember if right then, or even already before, but Jchj and I managed to use this space in rehearsals to actually get to know each other very deeply, because also Jchj shared from their past, their present, and their pain.

After proposing these forementioned first sexual encounter stories, Jchj encouraged me to bring a list of the people I had had sex with while still living with my parents. So, I sat down, wrote about 20 names down and told Jchj in the next rehearsal. Each name a story of a few sentences, in a loud manor, trying to narrate them as I usually narrate them. One after the other, story after story, sex in cars, the wood, behind the train station, on public restrooms. At the end Jchj took my hand and looked at me. They said: *"Moritz, are you alright? That all sounds terrible."* I think they cried a little. I get goosebumps thinking about it now. What had happened is difficult to explain fully. While before and after I had told friends and strangers some of those stories, without the context, without the amount, it had never created that image that was now presented to Jchj in our rehearsals. In a way I realized then, that I had actively searched for my own abuse for years.

Jchj was the first person to hear all of these stories in a row at once, not like my other friends over the course of years as little droplets, and they understood, or maybe just felt, saw, the possible underlying patterns that were there: the shame, the need for validation, the many abusive situations, the danger and my neglect to look at how these situations were created by my lack of love for myself. I mean, Jchj didn't see it like that right then and there, it took time for me as well, probably till now and I assume till forever: to see what is underlying there. But it was a start for me to deal with myself in a different manner. Jchj could relate to the pain, even though they had never acted out the way I had acted, building my self-worth from getting sexual validation solely from strangers. But still, with Jchj I was not alone, and we connected on that understanding of each other. It was the first time I was in a self-build "therapeutic" environment, part of my own process; it meant not having to explain everything from scratch. It was a revelation.

Till today, whenever we talk on the phone, and the other has a problem, we joke we are the "licensed therapists" for each other. And this being a therapist for the people you work with, without, you know "actually being a therapist", but bonding on the topics you connect with, trying to see yourself in the other, has been a major influence for the way I continued to work. Maybe the possibility to see myself in others, was the first moment I started being interested in others. LOL.

Stop talking. I learned telling stories through my family. My father and grandfather are - respectively my grandfather was - men who like to entertain crowds of people by telling stories. They can't remember a joke, but a funny story that places them in the center of the narrative won't leave their mind. Very famously in my family or in my memory at least, my grandfather wrote an unpublished short story on how he had shit himself at a camping space. So yeah. That's where I come from. But there is an issue with just being an entertainer: When you are just taking up space in conversations, when you treat everyone around you as your audience, you don't take them seriously. Life is not a stage then - you're just being a dick. When you're just asking one question for a start, to be nice, but then never following up, you are just being egocentric. That is also something I have inherited from both of them.

Maybe it is a personality trait, maybe it has been educated (nature vs nurture, bitch!) but I DID think, and it still happens, that I think: I know it all. I think my perspective is everyone's! That connects to these men in my family, because how can you listen if you just talk? I had this idea, that if I was marginalized as a gay man, I wasn't privileged at all. Which is not true. It was still me talking first most of the time shutting people up. And it's still a habit of mine, that needs constant attention, so it won't stay or fall back in that behavior. I think I had the feeling I needed to get my stories out and my life is the one with the obstacles, nobody can beat my pain. (Oh babe, couldn't have been more wrong!) It took a lot of work from the cis women in my early twenties to get that out of me, to be honest. I thank them for their patience in re-educating me, so I started asking questions.

"To have great pain is to have certainty, to hear that another person has pain is to have doubt.", is a quote from Elaine Scarry, I stumbled upon over three years ago when writing my application to ZHdK (but I still haven't read the whole book of hers, where the quote is from). I have heard some messed-up stories in my life. And whenever I think, it can't be more painful, I stumbled upon another story, that cuts my breath. Sometimes it takes years to confine with someone, sometimes it takes a night of cocaine, sometimes a hot tea, sometimes a phone call at night when you are eighteen and your best friend calls you, at least that is how you remember, and sometimes it takes a rehearsal space in theatre where you start talking about one thing in a group, and someone opens up the gates to their own memories, and you are sucked into their multiple lived realities. And that's obviously the beginning of the iceberg of pain, that "dominant cultures" but also life itself anywhere force upon people, who don't fit in their norms and sometimes even the ones that do.

I have heard of war, discrimination, neglect, abuse, rape, and more, by now I am being able to connect these experiences to my experiences, not only wouldn't I be the person I am today, but I wouldn't be the type of political advocate in different spaces that I am today. I honestly think that by now, when I hear the stories of pain, that others went through I'm not doubting them anymore, because I can relate them to a net of different experiences that have been shared with me. I know that Elaine Scarry's quote talks on a surface level about physical pain and how unique this physical pain is, how impossible it is to share this pain; that with all of the pain in your body, nobody but you, will ever know how this pain feels for you, because humans don't have the ability to connect to someone's feelings in this way. But to a degree it also talks about "dominant cultures" ideas, deciding what pain is, what pain you are allowed to feel and who is allowed to feel it. If you put only your pain as parameters of judgement, the way you feel, you experience the world as certainty; then any other person telling you they are in pain, can only make you not believe them. Only when you start connecting your pain, and the stories of pain of other people, you create an empathic bond. But for that you have to hear stories. How dare you being certain.

I spend a lot of time hiding myself behind big words or reading more and educating my self to be eloquent, that I actually thought, nobody could tell me anything, and I would know. But little by little, and embarrassing situation after embarrassing situation, being called out for it, or just realizing in the aftermath, I had to accept that I might know some things, I might have heard from some struggles, but I do not know ANYTHING actually. The uncertainty of life is endless, and so is my lack of knowing other people's experiences. So, I started to shut up, and listen. In most contexts. I remember writing down, in some rehearsals, or even after nights out: *"Ask questions!"* With a lot of exclamation points. But that was hard, because it always

means putting my assumptions aside, of which I have many. But when I do, I gain so much from the openness I can create by asking, and they stay open or transcend wider, when I connect them with my own experience. I don't want to say it works; it does not work a lot of times. But I am honestly trying to nurture connections by interest, by asking, by not assuming, by being surprised - and, even though it's really hard for me, by stopping to feed people specific words I assume they want to say, when they struggle to formulate their thoughts. Being with any other person can slowly teach you being humble.

English. Whenever I start writing, I do it in English by now. In the contexts I work in, speaking English is the norm. But also, when I don't have to it's helpful to me. I am writing this text in English. Probably I will translate it later (or not, depends on mood and time). But why?

In his insightful piece of writing *"How to write an autobiographical novel"* the Korean American author Alexander Chee manages to reflect on the, in his opinion, needed detachment from one's self for autobiographical writing, while comparing this with reading Tarot cards: *"You can't give yourself the impersonal [Tarot card] reading you need. It's much like writing an essay or including autobiographical content in fiction - to succeed, it requires an ability to be coldly impersonal about yourself and your state, so as not to cloud what is there with what you want to see. I think few of us know enough about our lives to know our place in them - we can't see ourselves as we might a character in a novel, with the same level of detachment and appraisal."*¹³

I think sometimes, that in writing English I manage to create this detachment and make something personal more fictional. When I write in English, I am distant, it's in a form where I can look at my selves. I can already perform my self. I get the story clear I want to tell. When I translate it, I manage to emotionalize it? I think. Maybe. It's a process, I am still not sure of. Looking at theory and writing in English, seem to be means of gaining an "objective" to my subject, which is myself. If in rare cases like the Covid pandemic I write diary, I write in German. When I write for stage, I write English.

There is a public and a private self in these languages, maybe. And even though I write personal in English, it's not private like when in German, because it has an audience in mind. But I must be careful, for example when thinking about my family and close friends, to think about them in German, because when I do it in English I tend to detach from the reality of the people, and instead continue writing the TV show I've been longing to write. Sometimes I think, living in these two languages, makes me slowly go insane. Not only do I have to care to remember what I said to whom, but also in which language - and therefore personality - I did.

Fiction. Which reminds me: I had been talking about the autobiographical part of the "therapeutic" writing and "empathic" staging process. But what's with the fictional? For this I'd like to have look in the pretext of the book *"Autofiktion als Utopie"* published by Yvonne Delhey, Rolf Parr, and Kerstin Wilhelms, in which they connect the autofictional and the utopian, as a way of creating something that is political, in my opinion: *"The term 'autofiction', which is relatively new in research, emphasizes the fictional moment of literary self-drafts (...), in contrast to views of autobiography oriented towards authenticity and truthfulness. One aspect is (...) that the life emerges from the work and the work in turn has an effect on the life (...). A second aspect (...) is that it causes permanent ambiguity among*

¹³ Chee, Alexander: How to write an autobiographical novel. Bloomsbury Publishing 2018. p. 32-22

readers as to how the text is to be read. The third element constitutive of autofictions is (...) the interweaving of "factual" life and fictional work."¹⁴

In addition to Fischer-Lichte, their term includes the self-narrative and fictionalizing layer much more clearly. Maybe instead of autobiographical performance one could just say autofiction immediately, as a way of putting two in one. The autofiction is a performance, it is what I do, when I order my writing: Which real story do I put where and why, as to figure out, what do I want to tell? Adding to what Erika Fischer-Lichte described as the possibility of autobiographical performance as a tool to question identity, the term autofictional emphasizes that this happens through fictionalizing the autobiography, as it anyway happens, whenever we explain ourselves to others.¹⁵

What I like even more, is that with using the autofictional, there is a way of creating utopian possibilities through new forms of self-constitution in different contexts. This is, where we scratch again what I mean with "social change" - by posing stories, that come from lived experience, in a fictional manner, as to create something that is more than just a narrative about the past but connects to more possible futures. This may be what José Esteban Muñoz means, when he writes: "*Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain.*"¹⁶ To work from a past which you look at and critiquing once life's circumstances can create different strains to new futures. This is one way how "social change" can be fostered, by placing ideas for possible futures, driven from the past. But it's a way of learning to let go of the idea of, when talking about my past, to fixate on the linearity of my experiences, not to think, "I need to tell it exactly how I remember it, one after one!", but allow new connections for my past, revisit my memories - to play with them. I would possibly, referring to my practice say: I tell the truth, but I tend to lie about it. And that lie shakes cultural production and discourse? Hopefully!

Fictionalization. I remember the show Ganz billig* - *a study in temperament I created with fag gods & friends, another collective of mines, which we wrote in the summer of 2019, and which premiered in end of January 2020. It was a show on gay, but then we decided we wanted rather to talk about queer, culture and we worked with personal stories, of course, creating dialogue from recording our rehearsal conversations. In the feedback after our first rehearsal block that summer in 2019, when mostly looking at the script, we were told that our show was good and deep but also: There was no conflict. The assumption we made, the reason we all agreed on, was, that we liked each other so much, that the show became soft, that it was a safe thing, nothing controversial in our so-called "different opinions" - because that is how we dealt with each other in the process. So, the "therapeutic" environment, made our outcome very "empathic" but slightly boring.

My two colleagues of fag gods & friends Paul Spittler and Ronald Berger then decided for themselves, they felt good staying with the characters they were, they didn't feel comfortable

¹⁴ Delhey, Yvonne; Parr, Rolf und Wilhelms, Kerstin: "Autofiktion als Utopie. Zur Einleitung", in Yvonne Delhey, Rolf Parr and Kerstin Wilhelms (Hg.): Autofiktion als Utopie. Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Paderborn 2019. S.2-3 My own translation.

¹⁵ The biggest difference probably is that "Autofiktion als Utopie" deals with literary texts and not texts specifically for stage.

¹⁶ Somewhere in Muñoz, José Esteban: "Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity". Combined Academic Publ. 2009. But I found it here: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/9027741-queerness-is-not-yet-here-queerness-is-an-ideality-put>

to change their personas, because they were associated with their real selves, through the stories but also the name. They didn't want to say outrageous and wrong and mean and bad (ergo: problematic) things. Because people would think it was them. I for one said immediately: "*If you don't do it, I will.*" For them at that point, being themselves on stage meant, being truthful to who they were. For me it felt like time to explore something different, it meant using my selves to explore things beyond myself. I felt safe to be mean because it's still a show.

This is so hard to explain to people who do this work for the first time. Of course, it's you, who's on stage, but that doesn't matter for the audience. It's you, your physical being with parts of your story, on stage and it deepens the character that is perceived as your life through your experiences, but again, it's not just you. You can also alter your experiences, change your run, sometimes or even all the time, have yourself try out saying things you would never say. Maybe thinking and writing about me and my ex-partner as split up in the show's script, during the process of splitting up, gave me a chance to imagine a possible good outcome of breaking up for real? Maybe I had "rehearsed" breaking up, while writing the show? After all the Moritz in "*Ganz billig*" - *a study in temperament" finds a GRINDR date at the end, a sign that he got over his ex-partner? But we'll get to that later.

I tell these stories to build my identity as well. I build a stage identity, but the fun with it is, in means of circular inspiration, that when I work with the personal, also my personal life is influenced through the process. My life becomes the work of art it has always been. But there are dangers with it, as explained by the New Zealand comedian Hannah Gadsby in her stand-up special "*Nannette*". The dangers are that, e.g., when you write comedy, you write a beginning and then a punchline. So, two parts. But as human beings, we tend to tell our identities with full stories, which have a beginning, a middle and an end. Her though experiment is this: If you keep telling jokes about yourself, your life becomes a joke, because you don't allow yourself the humanity of the "end" part of your story; or even just "revisiting" your story again, because the jokes keep your bills payed.¹⁷

You need to be careful not to make a joke out of yourself, not to shorten your existence. Because if you tell a story on stage a lot, it becomes so much a part of you, that it has the possibility to replace the memory of the actual event, and therefore with time the truth of that event for you disappears. Or if you do, you better remind yourself that you are minimizing your self for a reason, and that this is not how it actually happened. I instead wish to see my shows or the texts I write for other contexts, as broadening my existence, because I place them in discourse and possibly connect them to other realities of people that I am yet to meet. I really do hope that I manage not to shorten my self, although I already now notice, that sometimes I can't tell apart which versions of life events actually happened. Is that already the shortage? Because the words I use shape my mind, how I tell a story, not only how I perform it, but how I phrase it, gets stuck with me and at one point there is the danger that repeating them just goes empty.

In her book "*Sprache und Sein*" one of the lines of thought German writer Kübra Gümüsay follows is how marginalized, stereotyped communities can ever speak freely, when they have to wait to be asked to talk. If they always must argue along as what they are named from

¹⁷ You can find the special here: <https://www.netflix.com/ch/title/80233611>

"dominant culture", how can they ever talk free?¹⁸ When I read her chapters on free speech, I had issues swallowing (usually not one of my problems), because I wondered: Have I done it all wrong? When I go on stage and present my self as funny queer character, am I just repeating the patterns of oppression? Am I guilty too, of keeping the stigmas alive, when I acknowledge the things that fit to me, the patterns of sexual, outrageous, hand-gesturing behavior that I love so much re-enacting on stage, because they have been part of my life? Have they only been part of my life because I absorbed their dangerous, my life choices limiting, qualities? Did I bow down to society's ideas of the gay man and just think I'm free, while I just dance around naked in my cage? And not the cage I found in a club, but the cage I was thrown in by society, that wanted to see the go-go-boy dance for their amusement?

Clearly that is freeing, at least, you know, to be seen. But when and how do I create a version of my selves or a space, where I can be seen as I want to be seen? At which point do I stop commenting on my oppression and just live my life? When is it not only safe to be mean, but safe to be everything?

Queer autobiographies. Reading autobiographies is something I have always liked. I loved that I could read not only books by an author, but from an author about themselves. I had (and still have) a hunger to understand the people behind the books, probably to make me understand how I needed to be, in order to write (talking about the unauthentic self again). What I loved was understanding the relation of authors' books to their life, how their life, their surrounding had infused the work itself. How without a life, there is no work. I don't remember when I read a queer autobiography for the first time. But maybe it was the French sociologist Didier Eribon's "*Rückkehr nach Reims*" that I must have read in 2015 or 2016 that showed me a queer life in a time that I had not yet known.¹⁹ The difference to other work concerned about it, was, that it was not fictional, but written by himself, placing himself in thoughts and analysis for the times he lived.

What I found fascinating, is that I knew it was real. This was not a made-up story, that was probably inspired by real life events, but this life had been lived up until the point when it was written about. It had a specific weight, that no other book had, I knew. When you're queer and look around the culture to try to find representations of yourself, you develop an idea where you could go, to find evidence of queer lives. I think the fact remains that as a queer person with most culture, what you have to do is to de-code it, make it your own, by changing it, because it's not literally usable for you. A queer autobiography is different then, because it is a queer life, a life that of course is not one hundred percent like yours, but you share a ground again. No abstractions, no bending necessary. It's like meeting a queer person, but you look more in-depth than ever before, and it's set in a different time, it's a way to travel in time and understand the claims that were made back then, from a personal root.

I don't want to disguise the reality of my writing, because honestly, I need the validity of the reality of my experience. I need the biographical, so I can refer to the lived experience. It can't be just made up, otherwise it would not be real. But my life is real, my pain was and is real, my struggles are real, and they are valid. I write autofictional then, because I have to narrate my life, I tell a story of it, with the hope to create a different future for myself and others. Writers say sometimes, they write to touch the human, the possible universal, but how can

¹⁸ Gümüşay, Kübra: "Sprache und Sein". Hanser Berlin. 2020. p. 57

¹⁹ Eribon, Didier: "Rückkehr nach Reims". Suhrkamp Taschenbuch 2016.

someone write about others if that person doesn't accept the humanity of his subjects yet? Have them live through stereotypes, which are just a tiny part of the story? We - as the othered ones - have to write ourselves, if we want to have a clear picture of who we are. I had to write my selves in order to understand myself, I had to do it, then talk then write, then talk again. And now I must learn again to like the self I am, when I'm not one of my stage selves.

There were not enough people like me on stages. Still there are not. It only had started with the time at Maxim Gorki Theater that I recognized the lack of stories I needed to hear and the lack of people that I had already met in shabby bars or clubs, who were so much more alive than any white person in a theatre audience. Though I think the claim for diversity is always empty, if it doesn't start with the structures, and stops with a show that is performed. It's bittersweet thinking about Maxim Gorki Theater in this context. But maybe this is another story for another time, or, by now, it's actually not my story to tell anymore. Sometimes you can also decide that.

Voyeurism. What an audience does with autofictional writing is another story. I remember translating for an audience talk at Mühlheimer Theatertage 2015. One audience member asked the actresses, what was actually real in their play *"Common Ground"*. And Aleksandar Radenković said something like: *"Why do you need to know? It's not important. You see her crying. You become emotional. That's it. This is why you're here. Why do you need to know if it's real? Do you ask another actress, why she's crying on stage?"* At the same time, the situation I'm describing is different in the sense that: When I read about a queer life, I try to find my self in this life. If someone who is not from Ex-Yugoslavia wants to know, from the actresses from this region, what is real and what not, it's different, isn't it? It's voyeuristic or did he also just try to connect, like me? I don't know. But I know, that if I read *"from real life events"* I want much more from the script, the movie, the what-ever-it-is. It makes me uneasy as well because it excites me much more. As much as it's daring to put myself on display, I also like to see it, when other people do it. Maybe for the wrong reasons, too.

About others. I found a quote in Eileen Myles book *"Chelsea Girls"* from 1994: *"I wonder what anybody thinks about using your own life, the actual words people say to you in the secrecy of love, or separation, or the oblivious moments when they've simply torn off an insult and flung it at you and you're the one who remembers every little word, at least the ones I use and fling it back in their faces, if not there, then here [on these pages], sooner or later and they say, "Oh, I can't believe I said that." (...) I always think it's such a secret story, this one, I just need to tell this story for me or else I will burst. It's lonely to be alive and never know the whole story. Everyone must walk with that thought. I would like to tell everything once, just my part, because this is my life, not yours."*²⁰

The US-American writer really dips into questions I'm curious about: How is it when you talk not only about yourself, but the people around you? Because it is nice to talk about my selves, I have the power to create myself by writing, talking, editing. But how much can I use from a person, that is not me? Of course, I am always part of someone else's narrative and story in real life, but what happens if this is transported to the stage? Your idea of that person becomes a monolith. It becomes untouchable and it takes their life, something so fluid, not away from them, but out of their reach to re-form it again. With fag gods & friends, the frame story line we built for Ganz billig* - *a study in temperament was two roommates, one third

²⁰ Myles, Eileen: *"Chelsea Girls"*. Black Sparrow Press. Santa Rosa - 1994. p.258

moving in. I was the third, and we took what was there in rehearsals to build the story. I was moving in because my partner had left me.

In real life, my partner Giacomo and I were going through a big crisis, and I cried a lot in between rehearsals, he had not left me, but I was very confused, resentful, and sad. That energy had to go somewhere, so I proposed, and the three of us decided together to put it in the script. But not only this, but also a monologue I wrote on being queer and in love for the first time in your twenties, because before there was no possibility, not like when you're straight. So, when we started rehearsing again in January 2020, I went to my then ex-boyfriend Giacomo, because we had split up, we did, and showed him the script. I said: Look, the monologue is one thing, but the few sentences in dialogue, that refer to you - are you okay with those?

We sat down and talked, not only about the script but also about the relationship. He said he was okay with it (the play, not us), though he didn't think my comments were funny (though I intended them to be), but he was alright with it and anyway I made the boyfriend in the play Spanish and rude, instead of Italian and confused. I thought all was fine. Until he came to see the opening and left immediately after. He was super distressed.

What had happened? After the show he assumed, that everybody would think he had been an asshole in our break-up (which he wasn't), so he left in a hurry feeling ashamed. I thought that beforehand checking in with the person you write about, would be enough. But even though I wanted to make it right, using someone's life for stage still means, putting your perspective on it. And when you turn it around, it's hard to watch something concerning you, be played out on stage, without being able to interfere. And even though nobody thought of him as this asshole, he had to sort out the version of himself on stage, with his self and realize, it's just a show, even though it's not. Additionally, for him watching this show, made him believe our relationship was really over now, because for him, it became a whole show about our breakup, seeing me working through my pain and him being unable to pick up the dialogue, as he was shoved in the audience seat. I think it was very hard for him, but also somehow after that he was more over our break-up, so good for him, I guess?! It's an experience I can point to now when I use someone in another show. I can describe the problems he was facing, to give a possible insight in what can happen to you if I talk about you in my shows. You can't make everything right the first time, even though I wish you could.

Present. I use the term "empathic" very widely, and in a common understanding, but I feel, I should explain a bit what I mean - I think, in the "empathic" lies a possibility for communication with an audience. The "empathic" offers a way of emotionalizing, instead of intellectualizing. What I realize is that going into emotions, being vulnerable in performances happens very little, in the shows I have watched in the years I have been an active theatre watcher in the German speaking area. Let's say 2011-2021, mostly Germany with some visits to Austria, even fewer to Switzerland. For example, I really like German author René Pollesch's mind and his ability to re-contextualize theory and move it on stage. Yet I think he's a good example, for me at least, on what I would describe as non-empathic theatre, because it never touched me emotionally. And I really like to be touched. At the core of my humanity.²¹

²¹ Here a comment from my friend Thekla concerning this passage: *"If you're going to cite Pollesch, I think it makes sense to point out that his whole theater concept is aimed at disidentification or disintegration from the self-actualization imperative of late capitalism. That is the core*

Recently a friend of mine, Isabelle, who's in her early forties, described the art works of people my generation, born in the 1990s, as very soft and careful, in comparison to the aggressive digging out, that her generation had done. (And probably non-intelligent, when compared to Pollesch, but that's just my assumption now...) She wondered, where this engagement comes from, and why now in art works everybody just sings a sad pop song and wants to hug. For her it was exemplifying a trend in the 2010er years going into the 2020s. *"Let's leave aggression behind, read some theory together and dance a bit, that's not art,"* she seemed to want to say.

And I thought: *"But that's it, no? We have to deal with this shit now. It's one way of being super active and digging the dirt out from beyond the carpet or grave, this gives you a sense, a purpose. But now - what to do with it? I assume there must be a great deal of disillusionment of younger generations, my generation, to the fact that all that hurt, dirt, abuse, pain is here and out and about. Now we have to deal with it. But how to deal with open wounds and trauma? How do we get better, what are ways to live with the knowledge of the continuation of these things? Maybe all we can do so far is give each other hugs and try to make sure not another person gets traumatized by putting up content warning? I don't know!!!! Maybe it's not about the content anymore, but about the different possible forms of healing? Or, well, - Now I want a hug!"* Can you emphasize?

Trauma. How does the bad shape us, the things that are out of our control? I know a woman, the survivor of abuse in family, which is in her fifties now. She reflected with me that she had been taking care of girls exactly that age group since she considered herself a grown-up: She gives horseback riding lessons. The abuse and its societal consequences she had suffered through had made her want to take care of girls, she considered, not necessarily directly endangered, but anyhow possible to also be subjected to this kind of violence. She had become some sort of a guardian angel for a lot of girls, to possibly save them from something she had lived through. She feels obligated for taking responsibility, for this not to happen again, even though she knows it's not in her hand.

Sitting with this realization I must confess, that this idea of "helping out" or "connecting to" or "taking care" has been a major drive in my own work as well. Since working with Jchj and stepping into new working adventures, I have surrounded myself with people, of whom I know, I have similar experiences like I have, like the beauties from fag gods & friends, but also others. Together we form a sort of familiar bond inside and outside of rehearsals. The shared experience is our actual common ground to work through the things we have lived through, to share the knowledges of "survival", to lift each other up, to be there for each other. I dislike the word "survival", I can't relate it to my experience, if I do use it, I relate it to general queer "survival". I lived easily, some of my friends had to survive. To know this, or to make each other realize this, in the beginning of a rehearsal process, has been very important, we share similarities, but we come from different places of hurt. And became the base in order to say, from this moment on, we can be honest and feel understood.

This is a very one note understanding of a so-called "safe space", in which I don't believe anymore. Naming a space "safe space", gives the wrong impression that no misunderstanding

of Pollesch's work. And a whole political theater tradition that is directed against bourgeois empathy theater, because it wanted to stimulate people to think and to change their circumstances, with a lot of wit and virtuosity." Thank you for your thought here, I personally think that also emotions and empathy can stimulate people to think and change their and others' circumstances. But you know, agree to disagree.

could occur, or opinions could not differ. Yet they do. They question only is, how important is a different opinion, when you can feel close to people, because your experiences are similar, mutual, or connected? No place can be safe because the world is not safe. But what can feel safe is an environment that is fostered around taking care of one another empathically. I can have a fight and disagreement, not talk, be mad and disappointed, but nobody tries to steal my humanity in these spaces. And this experience can be rare for people who are marginalized, especially in still predominantly white and heterosexual theatre contexts.²²

I think my own vulnerability, my penetrability (I know... I KNOW - in German: Durchlässigkeit) has made me a person, people like to confide in. Strangers walk up to me and tell me their life stories. It happens regularly. Also, if you are anyway connected and easily talk and share own or other's stories of deep-cutting content, people tend to open up to you. Even though it is too much a lot of the times, and I never really know what to do other than saying, "*Thank you for sharing this*". I am thankful for that. Because it has shaped the way I can see the world. Not many people who grow up in normative ways (whatever that means; I can think of my father for example, or my brother), who don't have experiences of deep hurt or disconnect to their surroundings, because of the way they are or are made to be, have this chance to see the world from a perspective that is radical different than the one of normative society. On one hand, you feel you bring chaos to people's worlds, on the other hand everyone is happy to let go of their own heaviness. I think queer, in whatever definition you want to use, recognizes queer. Other recognizes other. Pain recognizes pain. You just have to be careful not to overload yourself as well. You can get sucked into other people's lives all too easily, you have to set boundaries as well. To be this trash can for everybody's stuff is one thing, the other is that you want to believe people and care for them.

I know that I have to be careful not to throw around other people's stories, only because I'm in a context where they are not known. It's easy to talk of family, if you know they're in another country and won't ever be able to see this specific show. But that's not always the case, and even then, at least to question. Of course, it's not possible to keep everything to yourself, but also don't act too lightly with private stories from your closest friends. It happens, it does, but I must remind myself, that some things are really not for me to tell, just to keep. I remember a friend telling me of a friend, who told someone else about her abortion. She said: "*I can't believe she would tell someone the most intimate thing that has ever happened to me.*" I remember squinting, because I had done the same thing, because I needed to release myself from the pain I felt for one part, but also for the other because it had been such a crazy story, I could not keep it to myself. I had gone completely over board and told it in a rehearsal to six cis-women, because my head was about to explode and also I didn't know how to hold her. Well. I guess I fucked up. Find the line, there is one!

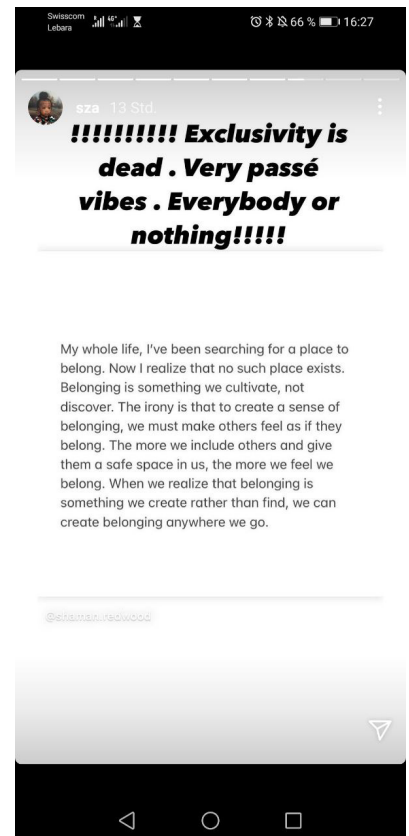
When is something, private, when is it tell-able, when is it usable for stage? How do you work with your life that informs your art? I like to quote friends directly, with or without naming them, just as much as I like to quote theory. You can ask, but what it does to the person, you can only find out and learn from your mistakes. The mistakes I do, because forever I wanted to let more people know how brilliant the people I've met are. Much like this quote from Alexander Chee says: "*I will never forget the classmate who said to me in workshop, about one of my stories, 'Why should I care about the lives of these bitchy queens?' It angered me, but I*

²² Arao, Brian and Clemens, Kristi: "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces. A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice" In: Landreman, Lisa M. (Ed.): "The Art of Effective Facilitation". Stylus Publishing 2013.

asked myself whether or not I had failed my characters if my story hadn't made them matter to someone disinclined to like or listen to them - someone like him. A vow formed in my mind that day as I listened to him, which has lasted my whole career: I will make you care."²³
Consider this a threat.

Sleepless. I know that I jump a lot from one topic to the other. I don't want to pretend like my thoughts come out of me in a clear order, because they don't. I read and re-read them, and new connections appear. An autofictional approach for me means exactly that, it's fiction, so I can make a new or even no order to my life. Anyway, life is not going from point G to Y over the letter A. Sometimes it's also just YAG. Or AYG. Nice sounds. At least now that it is 3:55am and I can't sleep, because this essay is rumbling in my head, that hurts from feeling torn most of the time between all things the people I love want from me, and the emptiness that is my own need. Finding this out, my own need, really is day to day work, week for week, month for month. Sometimes clear, most of the times a vast swamp to swim through. There is a lot of conjunctives at this hour, but maybe the most honesty lies in the word "could". *"There is no being in my life, just the becoming."* Who said that?

Urgency. *"If you ask me what family is, and I think of family as community. I think of the spaces where you don't have to shrink yourself, where you don't have to pretend or to perform. You can fully show up and be vulnerable, and in silence, completely empty and that's completely enough. To show up as you are without judgement, without ridicule, without fear or violence or policing or containment. And you can be there, and you're filled all the way up. We get to choose our families; we are not limited by biology. We get to make ourselves. We get to make our families."*, says the trans-activist Janet Mock, quoted in a song by the artist BLOOD ORANGE.²⁴ And I think it's a duty to listen to terrible stories to some degree at least, and, even in a country where I can feel more and more safe on the street, it's my duty to advocate spaces in which people can just show up and be who they are. This is family then, this is belonging. And to create a culture of belonging, whoever wants to create it first needs to create belonging for other people, as one can see in this picture of an Instagram post by the artist SZA, as I put it next to the text. I agree especially with this: *"When we realize that belonging is something we create rather than find, we can create belonging anywhere we go."* Mona Louisa-Melinka Hempel one of my collaborators found this post during our first research for COSMIC ROOM, a darkroom for sharing queer experiences in "dominant culture". Thanks for that, Mona! And yes: Everybody or nothing!!!!



Kübra Gümüşay writes about urgency as well, in *"Sprache und Sein"*, and that word is the reason for me to want to write about the stories I have lived through and heard and encourage people to take their stories in the hand of how the cuttings of societies hurt them: because them and me, you and I, want to see these things changed.²⁵ And that's why I do this

²³ Chee, Alexander: *How to write an autobiographical novel*. Bloomsbury Publishing 2018. p. 133

²⁴ Listen to it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVeei0rTyBU>

²⁵ Gümüşay, Kübra: *Sprache und Sein*. Hanser Berlin. 2020.

work. I want to create sharing and thinking spaces for people to come together, that enable them to talk about their lives and create art on top of that. Because only when multiple perspectives are brought together, the truth of what humanity or being alive even means can be seen in the shared overlapped fragments.

"Around and around they went, circling essential truths that no one wanted to look at directly, as if they were the sun: Women could abuse other women. Women have abused other women. And queers needed to take this issue seriously, because no one else would.", writes the American novelist Carmen Maria Machado in her autofictional memoir *"In the Dream House"*.²⁶ The question I see in this quote, which is, why I brought it, is to ask, who has to tell which story and why, and to ask, which stories are of interest. Can you bring a new topic into the discourse or a new perspective to something already talked about to death? Then you should, maybe in a way that is not literary perfect or anything. I personally believe it's not necessarily how, or in which way things are said - because that's defined by something like literary hegemony as well - but THAT they are said is important. It's astonishing to see authors like American Vietnamese author Ocean Vuong really go all the way into the high circles of US-American literature and write poetry and planting himself with *"On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous"* in the tradition of the great American novels.²⁷ It's brilliant and exquisite. But it's also not necessary. You can thrive for form, but it's not necessary as long as you have the content. I also think, it's not necessary for stage - my criteria are more the possible connection and the relationship that is fostered through communication and not necessarily an additional form that goes beyond the personal story telling approach. Because this might distance you from the audience, when they feel they don't have a real person in front of them, their identification process is stopped. Form follows function, who said that? Doesn't matter. I think in this case, it's actually right: if the function is to create personas on stage, that are people, instead of characters, write as you talk. Sometimes I have moments, where I sound so smart (I'm really astounded by my own brilliance sometimes).

"Empathic" But, when talking about the "therapeutic process", the question remains of what is an "empathic piece of work"? I tried to answer it before, but then I all I needed was a hug. I still wonder, if the frame "personal stories used in the process of doing this production" is all it takes, or if the "empathic" would remain, if there wasn't this disclaimer? What changes in the work, if the process is not understanding and emotionalizing a play, but understand the self and connecting, maybe also emotionalizing, with one's self, creating one's self? How's that then more "empathic"? Why does talking and sharing a real struggle feel so much more "empathic", why can an audience relate so much easier, with this specific expectation of "real life events" on stage?

My friend Orit Nahmias, an AMAZING actress, once told me, that there is a process within the creative process for her: She starts off with a lot of hopes and dreams, full of her own potential; then during the talking, the writing and the rehearsals, she loses herself, she gets sad and angry and depressed, but most of the time, during the last days, she finds the new Orit. The new Orit can emerge, once the old Orit takes a step back to look at the journey, to find she has grown in the process and is able to see that the questions she had to start with transformed. She is, by the way, a huge inspiration to me as she is the only actress, I've met so far, that still sets intentions for every show she does. And the interesting thing is, that she

²⁶ Machado, Carmen Maria: "In the Dream House". Serpent's Tail 2020.

²⁷ Vuong, Ocean: "On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous." Penguin LCC US 2019.

dives into a work, that is infused by herself and the selves of other people, so the process is a stepping in and out of the shared spaces they created, which made the play in the end possible. Every show becomes a new trial, an experiment for her life, she can look at, she can ask new questions about it and find new perspectives within it. There lies a great possibility for artists, to do something that is in-between theatre and ritual as she is interpreting every opportunity to perform.

What I mean with theatre and ritual in the process of "therapeutic", "empathic" but also the framework of autofictionality is: The theatre part is the one which is presenting something, that has been written or developed collectively, through what I would call rituals (or just thought processes) to go deeper within yourself, with an honesty and clarity and confusion and humanity. This journey is taken to develop a script, but then re-lived as a show ritual in front of a public, and therefore creates an "empathic" bond with the audience. An audience relates to it, because they get a hunch, that it's real. When someone stands in front of you and shares with you their emotional thinking process to anything, how could you turn away? Unless it is acted, of course. So DON'T ACT! Just bring your beautiful selves, that you find in a "therapeutic" process with people, who can hold you, because you found connections to all or even just some of them, and then create a show that shares this specific bond of empathically being-in-the-world with your partners on stage and the strangers that come to watch you.

You don't just do it for yourself, even though it might sound like it now, but you're dealing with the truth you find in a process, and you can be held accountable by the audience, witnessing your journey of self-discovery. With that self-discovery can come the critique of the normative as well, because your process of identification, your sharing of the difficulty of being your self, any self, exemplifies the pressures in society, the issues you and many others deal with - that fact that there is never just one thing, but many contradictory feelings, needs, inside of any human and by outlining that, you also outline the borders of state control in any system in the world. By showing up, and by existing, and by speaking, you become an example of life itself, that can't tick any box on a form. You are real. So am I.

Memories. I have troubles with forgetting. Not only but ALSO because I smoke a lot of weed and probably will continue to do so. It's a family thing. *"It destroys the soul, we know it"*, my aunt recently said. And my dad, standing next to her, took a puff from the joint to agree with her statement. Did that happen or did I make it up? Sometimes I think, I took on writing shows and dealing with questions, situations that happen during the process of writing - because I mostly write FOR a cause, and not just for fun, I do notes, yes, tiny sentences but I don't sit down and start a writing process, I wouldn't know how, what did I want to say? Ah! - because the writing is a tool to remember my life. To not have it all going up in smoke.

There is a good question on form, concerning the writing of the self: Why should it be so visible? Why the need to make it appear as if it was congruent with the person speaking? Or, how Giacomo once asked me: *"Why don't you rewrite it a bit, so not everybody knows that what you write, has actually happened or can be traced back?"* I think there is the question of safety and deception. On one hand, yes. It would be very safe to rework my stories, so they are not one-to-one with life. But that's the part that is so important, in relation to my life, the context exists, the surrounding, the political the background is there in front of which the story happens. I feel if I change that too much, I believed, I could tell another story. I would

need to tell another story. This is for my stories. Writing real people of my life into my shows, is a way of thanking them for being with me all along the way; without them I wouldn't be who or where I am today, so I want to name them, or at least: show them as intricate part of my journey. That's how I do it with my life. Of course, I can change tiny things, in order to safe people from embarrassment - but what still doesn't change, on the other hand, is that they will see themselves in the story anyway, because they know who they are in the text, right?

I once thought this sentence for a show, but then didn't say it: *"This is the safest situation I can think of."* What I didn't say was: "Because you don't know what's real, neither do the people I have worked with. Only I know what actually happened." And with this power, this knowledge a character is created, in the gap, by the deception of everyone, but yourself (and sometimes even yourself).

"Social change". *"In its queer and feminist context, softness is the place from which we can build better political principles, the place from which we can build a better world. The turn to softness has ushered in new political sensibilities. We're no longer interested in pretending we can live without each other, or pretending we don't feel pain."*, says Andi Schwartz in an explanatory piece on "softness" as a method in queer politics, which underlines my interest in politics and in writing.²⁸ This article can be viewed in various ways, one would be to denounce her definition of patriarchy, as well as femininity and masculinity, but still this sentence really speaks to the "social change" I have in mind as well: If we as queer artists, writers, whoever - even if not queer -, don't create space where we can allow ourselves to rest, to get strength again, before and WHILE going out creating - how can we not just blindly react (and not consciously act) against the limitations put on us by "dominant cultures"? But it's not enough to only promote softness when you don't take action. But maybe you're opening about your struggles on stage is leading someone else to doing the same thing in their life? Maybe this is the starting point? When I write this I still feel like a very soft idiot.

In Anni McAllen's piece opposing Andi Schwarz text and the general notion of culture as the leading factor in change in the world, she writes: *"The politics of solidarity have long offered the answer to the paradox of individuality. By working together, we can solve the conflict between individual and community, between self-growth and social change, by building communities of struggle, resilience and more importantly political action against the state, patriarchy and capitalism."* Ergo we need to bring culture and means of production together, and: *"By believing that by changing the culture one can transform politics, liberals have systematically failed to transform much at all, continuously losing power to reactionaries who do understand politics and crush them every time. (...) By promoting cultural affectation and personal lifestyle choices (such as lifestyles of emotionality) as a mode of social transformation, the Radical Softness movement promotes an individualist view of social change, where individuals make choices about their own lifestyles, and interact with other atomised, individualised units."*²⁹

I would just love to disagree on one major thing, which is something I feel left theorists like to do, namely the essentialist view on the rightness of just this one way. I think instead of saying: *"Just showing emotionality is bullshit, what about the class struggles? This is the real*

²⁸ Schwartz, Andi: "The Cultural Politics of Softness" <http://gutsmagazine.ca/the-cultural-politics-of-softness/> Last Access: 03.11.2021 11.15am

²⁹ McAllen, Anni: "Against the cultural politics of softness: Or How to kill your own power" <https://www.floodmedia.org/articles/against-the-cultural-politics-of-softness-or-how-to-kill-your-own-power> Last Access: 03.11.2021 11:30am

important thing!" (Hello, German left politician Sara Wagenknecht! Or any Left politician for that matter) I view these things as having to go together. I think to create "social change" within the arts (and elsewhere), cultural PRODUCTION needs to be reconsidered and changed while at the same time putting vulnerable, tender, and soft topics in the foreground. Art production needs to be thought of intersectionally and all forms of critique and critical practices need to be brought to the top. The basis of all of this is also personal work, the work to create space for everyone to speak out; because we are not alone but we are interdependent when we want to be free.

I stumbled upon an explanation of talking freely that Kübra Gümüşay develops in her book *"Sprache und Sein"*. She talks about one specific experience talking on Instagram Live with other women who are stereotyped in same and different ways, but together they spoke on topics of their heart, and mind, not only their discrimination: *"And that was it, the new language I had been dreaming of for years. Speaking with people who don't push me to make myself understood, who add their perspectives to my stories and thoughts. Speaking with people to whom I don't have to prove any belonging. (...) Speaking freely means emancipating ourselves from a language that doesn't provide for us - by changing it instead of explaining ourselves, by using it differently in order to be in it."*

When I read this idea of speaking freely, speaking anew, I remember all the moments I was in rehearsals, where I did not have to fight for my humanity, where I could be queer, but my queerness was not limiting, it was just a mere note to my self and my work. What I mean with "social change" is this, too. This speaking freely, that Kübra Gümüşay is talking about. It is about the space we create from together, about the meeting points in our vulnerabilities, in accepting the other for who they are and just asking them to speak as themselves. As their beautiful selves. I think, that talking about the self on stage is a means on changing what bodies and topics take space in the public eye. I think, in order to make this process one of joy, also the means of production need to change, to allow more different and even contrary voices to create art. But this comes at the price of work, trial and A LOT of error.

From the top. Talking about yourself, using yourself and your surrounding as a source to create is a tender process that needs to be managed very differently from creating any show with a pre-written text, or just the premiere of a contemporary writers text featuring their singular voice, because it is partly a process to create your self through writing. Performing the self on stage is not just the work of actors, and the actors who take part in it, should know that this work wants different things from them: it needs them to want to ask themselves questions, and allow themselves to be transformed by failing to deliver themselves answers. But it is important to give participants the power on what they say. And the power to take it back and not say it. The power to lie if they need to. The chance to find ways to say things differently. Self-determination in processes, instead of direction receiving needs to be the goal. Then different stories can be posed in the discourse, stories with urgency, not defined by "dominant culture".

Creating authorship must be rethought, because life is written, quoting the dancer and choreographer Raimund Hoghe (who himself quoted Pier Paolo Pasolini), while *"throwing the body into the struggle"*³⁰. Therefore, it's about "throwing stories on paper" or "throwing self(ves) into discourse." A prize may be the blurring of one's self with that of the stage

³⁰ Read: http://www.raimundhoghe.com/de/de_dasunperfekte.html Last access: 01.11.2021 9:30pm

characters. What can be the gain is inter-connectedness through breaking the identity constructions with diversity. By having more than one person write a text, the possibility for diverse perspectives is given almost automatically. (It's simple math! But don't get it twisted, people are different, and no identity marker can prepare you for someone acting differently than you'd expect them to - it's about the people, not the identities, in the end!) It's different, not more or less valid, just different, if an author writes by themselves, as when people write together, the ideas, backgrounds, phantasies really differ and together they can create something that wouldn't have been there without the conversation in community. Also, stories become more accessible and real when they are written from within experience and not "just research" (even though, proper research can mean the world, I'm not saying nobody can write about people outside of themselves, only it's a much bigger work, than most writers have not been willing to do it so far).

Trauma is a big part of the lives we live and the people we share space with. We should be thinking about how to educate ourselves much more, when working in the field of arts as well. And I'm speaking clearly to myself as well, here, when I say: You need more knowledge, honey, only because you have some experience, it's not yet enough. Always remember: How dare you to think you know it all!

But also - re-thinking or re-doing the way that shows are created is important. When actors always jump from one production to the next, how can they be held? Starting in the production spaces in the arts, going over in who creates artworks and what is their content, seeing what shifts happen where I work and how do they effect the world around me, all of these processes that have started and are on-going but need constant re-calibration, meaning discussing what freedom for everyone could mean. Freedom, in my opinion connects also to care during processes and after care as huge factors to the well-being of the people you work with and yourself. So, the institutions need to be tackled, as well as casting agencies or publishing houses. How can work be restructured? How can more brave spaces be created?

These are some possibilities for "social change", a change that is embedded in all of these daily rehearsal and non-rehearsal tasks. We will have to see, how action can be created from our need for being held. Every process is new, it brings new people, a variety of ways of working and perspectives on life. There lies a potential in this specific unspecific "social change" if we all slowly not only take "art" but also "art production" and therefore world-making into our hands.

Futures. My life is a testimony, the only evidence I have is my memories: Remember the conversation with the sexy male director I had in the beginning of the text? I know it sounded bad. But actually, my ego was only hurt for five minutes. Because I realized, so much more quickly, than when I was younger, that his opinion just didn't need to matter to me. I took some breaths and managed to let it go. It might sound tiny to you, but for me - HUGE step! I was surprised myself. As much as I was surprised while writing this text, how much thoughts I actually had on my own process. How many memories, feelings and needs I had talking (you see!) ergo writing in the end. I'm so happy having had this time to reflect the motives I have for continuing my artistic process. And it's funny to me that there is a name for all it as well: autofictional writing.

My need to talk about myself comes from the need to define my selves apart from the stereotypes, but also acknowledge how they, and the societal gaze has shaped me - it comes from the need to create a self. It was important for me for a long time to talk as that, what was put on top of me (because I'm such a bottom). But this is just one side of me, a VERY fun side, yes, but a side. My life is a reference point, a perspective I will always have, and it enabled me to begin stepping on stage. It allowed me to actually create my self outside of stage as well. Now I can turn my interest in a variety of ways, because I have found - a voice. It started to be defined by expectation from outside. But because I connected, truly connected to people, with whom I felt togetherness, and created safe bonds to create in, I learned to talk outside of my limits. I have to be careful to keep these spaces open, to keep them moving. But I know they are there. And I know that in this understanding of how I want to work, in the fact that I HAVE worked like this lies a lot of potentiality.

It is a fixed idea of mine that I need to tell true stories real stories so nobody can say, "*That is made up and never existed!*". I need the proof of these lives in order that nobody can tell me another life is not possible. It is possible, it was in the past and it is now. It's an affirmation of myself and other selves I didn't know growing up. They are examples of practices of "survival" in any number of forms. They are here. I think in the moment you write from yourself, you are much more accessible. My work is about the people I've met with whose vulnerabilities I connected (that's why I'm referencing and name dropping them all the time). In the end, it will have to be about connecting to the people from "dominant culture" as well. But that's a long way to go...

In writing not only about my struggles, but about the struggles I have encountered, in bringing them on stage I found love. At the same moment, trying to understand the other perspective, the perspective that hurts me and wants to diminish me - to try to understand this side, too, to understand that their pain has a source, gives me the possibility to love these people, too. Maybe the process anybody has to start, if you feel no belonging or (in)difference to "dominant culture" is, to understand that we are all other. And if we are all other, we just need acceptance of the inevitable mistakes we are about to make. There comes a responsibility with that: to know one's pain, means acknowledging that it's my pain as well, because we inhabit the same world, the source of your pain is maybe not mine, but I can't be free if you are not, it means if you are policed, then I am policed, it means solidarity with whomever is burdened. These struggles are my motor, because they derive from the never just societies, we live in. We all have different sides, that want to be acknowledged, forgiven, loved. I can talk as a human now. Sometimes it doesn't need to be a whole revolution, but a small step still has a revolutionary spark in it, that's for sure. Honestly: I just really love people. Even the ones that scare me.

So, this is how I came and continue to come to be: I had to recognize my own humanity, then I could turn my gaze outward again. Through the "therapeutic" process I can write "empathic" theatre, through autofiction I test my limits and get to know myself beyond my selves and beyond as what I am accused of.³¹ I have to think again of José Esteban Muñoz, and his influential work "*Cruising Utopia*". I think I surf the borders between being safe and hurt towards a utopian future that will never be. This is the "social change" talking about one's self can create. I lived it. And I know, it's coming for you too!

³¹ A little more general twist on Hannah Arendt's quote "*If you are attacked as a Jew, you have to defend yourself as a Jew.*"

Thank you so much for following me through my thoughts. I hope it wasn't too self-indulgent or egocentric or too general or not interesting. If you have questions, drop me a mail to moritzsauer@gmx.net, I would love to hear your thoughts on this. So far, all my work has been a dialogue, I would like it to continue this way, also for this essay. So, if you have anything: Make yourself read. I wish you a pleasant day! :)

Special thanks to: Monika Gysel (for suggesting theoretical piles), Fiona Rae Brunner (for listening and questioning my speaking), Thekla Neuß (for reading and correcting my writing)

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Bildnachweis:

S. 19: Story von SZA auf Instagram. Eigentum: Mona Louisa-Melinka Hempel

Hiermit versichere ich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbständig ohne fremde Hilfe angefertigt habe. Alle Stellen, die ich wörtlich oder sinngemäss aus öffentlichen oder nicht öffentlichen Schriften übernommen habe, habe ich als solche kenntlich gemacht.

Zürich, den 13.12.2021

MORITZ SAUER

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping, fluid strokes that form a stylized representation of the name 'Moritz Sauer'.