

Response by Milena Meier

Dear Mira,

Your contribution jumps out at me from many different angles. I see your text as an invitation to look closely, to think carefully and to consider the implications of the various narratives of change, crisis and catastrophe. I like to follow you as you point out the proximity between crisis and catastrophe and the performative arts. Your work also serves as a reminder: Has the concept of crisis and catastrophe slipped away from my understanding of theater unnoticed, as with the students you describe?

Have crisis and catastrophe also been pushed to the meaningless margins in my understanding of theater? You ask for “paths of knowledges”, that bring theater and reality into a different relationship and enable theater pedagogy to create alternative futures, and you plead for new possibilities for play and performance. Dialogically oriented practice is one of these new play and performance possibilities. I would be so interested to hear more of your thoughts on this! This is a point in your text that sparks something in me and makes me think further. In my engagement with dialogic practice, I hadn't yet thought about the close proximity of crisis and catastrophe in theater. Bringing the crisis into the dialogical process as something deeply intrinsic to theater ignites a fire in me. I ask myself, what qualities could a dialog practice expand if I understand it as a game within an agreed performative framework? Does the game make it possible to expand and transcend individual positions? When does resistance arise within me, when is the gap between my position and that of my dialog partner so great that it

leads to a catastrophe that ends in failure, or what alternative options for action open up to me at precisely this moment of crisis? For me, dialog practice has a great proximity to the subject from whose understanding you want to move away, if I understand you correctly. However, I also see dialog practice as a practice of entanglements and of entering into relationships. Perhaps we should fundamentally describe it as a dialogical-cultural practice that is no longer (only) about the individual subject, but about the reflection of cultural practices, about “learning unlearning” (Nora Sternfeld) and the expansion of cultural practices? This does not mean giving up one’s positions, but opening up to other patterns of thought and the biographical, historical and cultural particularities that have shaped these patterns and practices. Perhaps this occasionally leads to personal crises that deeply question the seemingly familiar. My hope is that other paths, perspectives, thoughts and actions will become possible in cultural dialog practice, which creates ambivalence as a permanent state in which alternative forms of living together are generated and in which de-subjectification (Elisabeth Sattler) is always already part of the process and which always considers the subject in relation to the cultural context.

I would like to address another point in your text, the self-questioning about your figure as a teacher and the comment that your experiential knowledge becomes ‘fragile’ in a changing, still transforming, crisis-ridden time, does not take sufficient account of the demands of contingent societies. What strategies, beyond irritations, could become essential? What comes to mind? I am exploring the concept of irritation. I deliberately leave out the extensive theory on irritation as a moment of educational processes and ask myself what associations the concept of irritation currently has for me. Does irritation also have something to do with deception, deliberately luring someone into a trap, irritating them in their usual or strategically repositioned approach? Is irritation part of the logic of war, or does the background of current war events influence my associations with ‘irritation’ (which I am actually very attached to in educational contexts)? I would like to explore with you and others what further steps we could take to remain capable of acting in training contexts. The mode of ‘getting involved’ comes to mind. ‘Getting

involved' in the thinking of students and, conversely, getting students involved in the thinking of teachers with their other historical connections and, in general, getting involved in other ways of thinking (beyond positions) as a possible way of teaching-learning contexts. This would take time and is diametrically opposed to artistic education in the form of a timetable that can be mapped in credit points and is contrary to economically oriented study programs. Would amazement, as a form of pausing and reflective realization of a possible other or third way, be a moment to strive for in the teaching-learning processes? Nicola Gess, Professor of Modern German Literature and an expert on amazement, states that "there is also a long tradition in cultural history that reflects on amazement in the sense of a contemplative or meditative practice that can also be learned, cultivated and practiced" (Gess: <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/staunen-affekt-nicola-gess-100.html>).

In times of change, a state of emergency, which leads to uncertainty on the part of all those involved in the teaching-learning process, what is perhaps needed in addition to irritation is communication that is characterized by the ability and willingness to enter into a relationship, to follow the thought paths of others like a path through the forest that has never been taken before, or perhaps to follow the other person diving unexpectedly and discovering the underwater world of the other person. This requires one thing above all: trust. Is trust a foundation that needs to be developed in order to remain capable of acting in the future? Would trust be the prerequisite for living, as you write, "the art of becoming an ambivalent community in which we practice non-conformity"?

Warm regards,
Milena

