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Responsible Combodying: The Intelligence of Discomfort in Guiding Interactive Performance

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Elvira Crois (1992) works at the University of Antwerp in preparation of a PhD dissertation. Through participatory methodologies her research aims to identify training contexts for the development of a performer's capacity to interact with an audience in embodied interactive and participatory performing arts practices.

ABSTRACT

Using affect theory, I explore how a performer's guiding skills for interactive performing arts improve when the performer takes into account both their own discomfort and that of the audience. I propose an analysis of the work of Myriam Lefkowitz (FR) and Sarah John (AU/DK) using the concept of 'responsible combodying'. This non-dyad approach, which incorporates the qualities of listening and articulating propositions, supports the view that discomfort provides a performer the opportunity to learn and readjust their chosen line of action.

KEYWORDS: Interactive Performance, Participatory Theatre, Audience Participation, Guide, Affect, Responsibility

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1. INTRODUCTION

*There is only one rule: it is a silent experience.
If there is anything that disturbs you, do not hesitate to tell me.
You can stop the experience at any time.
To start off, I am going to ask you to close your eyes
(Lefkowitz 2015, 9).*

Similar to Walk, Hands, Eyes, these instructions lay the groundwork for the one-to-one performance La Bibliothèque, a walk created by French artist Myriam Lefkowitz at the university library in Amsterdam. Through a frame engendered by the principles of silence and closed eyes, we embark on a journey. A sightless, though perceptive promenade through a building I have never been to, although quite familiar for an academic.

We cross hallways, pass through bookshelves, encounter giggles, stop, turn, the creaking of a door, wait and go. People are present, surrounding, but then, again, silent. A silence because it is a library? A silence because she has led me to a deserted space? I open my eyes – maybe twice? The red felt I am leaning against captures me; a quiet corner for telephone calls and intimate pauses during an interactive performance. Once, I am invited to lay down; I wonder what it is I am feeling, as objects (or am I imagining it?) nest around my leg, part my fingers, and cross the fore of my body. Up again, onwards. It does not feel as if we have to discover how to walk together, how to play. The ease of it all bewilders me. And why is it that this blind guidance somewhat feels as a shiatsu session, truly subtle and constantly shifting, in continuous movement? Ever drifting. While we wander through spaces, Myriam’s hands roam my unfamiliar body. I am in awe of her skills. Are they skills?

We end, sitting down in an aisle of bookshelves. I can take my time, choose a book, and together we’ll read a passage on a randomly selected page. I laugh. “Yeah, sure, I know which book you want me to choose”. I am sitting next to Homo Ludens by Dutch historian and cultural philosopher Johan Huizinga. A feeling of disbelief when she proclaims she has never heard of the book, nor of Enrique Vargas or Teatro de los Sentidos. Refreshing in a way, as my academic heart leaps: I have found someone with a somatic performance practice akin to that of Sarah John!

This account of my experience of *La Bibliothèque* equates with a multitude of interactive work in which an audience is accompanied by a guiding performer. This likeness does not stem from a similar scenography or structure, nor does it employ the same sensorial and perceptive devices. While I could argue Lefkowitz’s practice is embedded in a poetic language similar to that of Australian-Danish artist Sarah John, I propose to focus on the role of the guide to explore a deeply rooted connection between both practices. Specifically, through qualitative research methods, I explore the performer’s capacity to guide an audience.

In the first section of this article, called *Discomfort as a Guide's Interpellation*, I formulate what should be considered 'guiding' in the featured practices of this article. Central to my argument is the disqualification of 'the enunciative dichotomy between speaker and listener' (Guattari 1990, 66). Rather than attributing one main function to the performer or audience, I argue every body present during a performance realises both capacities. This understanding is established through Hannah Arendt's view on power as non-instrumental and Bruno Latour's 'affective' conception of the body. On those conceptual grounds, I will discuss the practice of Myriam Lefkowitz using interviews conducted by myself (2018) and other researchers (Evans and Lefkowitz 2014; Lefkowitz and Lavergne 2014; Perrin 2017)¹.

This opening section sets the stage for a review on how one can train their attentiveness to discomfort by analysing how discomfort informs a performer's guiding. To this end, in *Discomfort in Training as a Guide*, I develop terminology based on Akira Ikemi's 'responsive combodying' and Joan Tronto's ontology of care. My proposition of 'responsible combodying' as an essential aspect of guiding allows theorisation and an analysis of the practice of 'flocking'. This somatic method is considered in its academic descriptions and is complemented by records of 'participant observation' (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 28) during a laboratory in flocking organised by Sarah John (April 2019, Copenhagen).

2. DISCOMFORT AS A GUIDE'S INTERPELLATION

Affects function like resonances, distributed among bodies, growing and weakening in intensity. They circulate, intersect, and intertwine through the world and attach to environments, technologies and (non-)human agents (Salter 2015, 81). Instead of residing in one sole body, affect 'sticks just as well to the subjectivity of the one who is its utterer as it does to the one who is its addressee' (Guattari 1990, 66). In their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, Seigworth and Gregg assert that 'affect can serve to drive us towards movement, toward thought and extension' (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 1). While they often occur as an overpowering force, this paper considers the lingering of affect, or its recurrence. Affects do not always arise forcefully and suddenly, but can also hold onto and return, giving rise to an affective pattern. They are not only extraordinary, but can equally occur in the 'heterogeneous, crisscrossing flow of *everyday* rhythms and actions' (Salter 2015, 81). Todd W. Reeser and Lucas Gottzén elaborate on the role of affect in reinforcing normativity as well as rethinking hegemonic structures. They state that the recurrence of affect allows for a continuing process of becoming. In other words, affect as a cyclic movement provides ongoing opportunities to engage with normativity and convert hegemonies (Reeser and Gottzén 2018, 153). This aligns with Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead's assertion that affect most dynamically signifies potential as it circulates and, in turn, holds the promise to affect other bodies (Pedwell and Whitehead 2012, 116).

¹These articles were published in French. All quotations used in this paper are my own translation into English.

In art theory, affect is often theorised in terms of connection, resonance and attunement. While these notions in itself are neutral, simply referring to a shared sense, they are repeatedly framed as an ‘optimal flow’ or ‘synergy’ (Hanna 1987; Elkins 2004; Thompson 2009; Salter 2015), based on recognition or consensus and implying an ‘ease’. I argue that performers in interactive practices need to be attentive to affect not merely on the basis of similarity, but of difference as well. By including the notion of difference instead of considering affects to be established in spite of it, we can consider the guidance of the performer not merely oriented towards wholesome togetherness. The encounter of difference is addressed through the affect of discomfort (Tomkins 2008), which I deem a source of intelligence to inform the performer’s attentiveness (Plotegher, Zechner, and Rübner Hansen 2013, 36). This reconception of the role of the guide opens up the narratives and debates on the holistic character of interactive performance.

2.1 NON-INSTRUMENTAL POWER

Discomfort is often ascribed to an audience partaking in an interactive performance. There are manifold reasons why an audience feels disconcerted, ranging from uncertainty of the code of conduct to having difficulties with ethical choices of the artists. This paper takes into account discomfort of the audience as well as that of the performer to review how attentiveness to difference improves a performer’s guiding skills. While discomfort moves between bodies and thus does not solely reside in one audience member or the performer, for the sake of the argument, I will start with a focus on the audience and then turn to the discomfort of the performer.

First of all, the audience’s discomfort allows us to address the issue of power in interactive performance. There are undeniable forces of power at work in interactive practice, as power springs up between people when they act together and vanishes when they disperse (Arendt 1958, 200). Following German-American philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt, this paper considers power as relational, which is not necessarily linked to hegemony, domination or violence. Intrinsically connected to Arendt’s conception of action, power is non-instrumental and does not have the aim to order or to compel. It revolves around initiation and invitation; it is not imposed, but rather relies on a response of acceptance or refusal. Furthermore, while these invitations may be directed towards an (open-ended) aim, power is an end in itself. According to Arendt, power structure precedes and outlasts all aims. Therefore, far from being the means to an end, power is actually ‘the very condition enabling a group of people to think and act in terms of the means-end category’ (Arendt 1972, 150).

This conception of power leads us to consider how guiding takes shape in the practice of Myriam Lefkowitz and Sarah John. To guide means both to listen and speak to the audience. These acts do not always manifest through words, but can equally emerge in a somatic manner. It is not unheard of for these skills to merge into attunement, in which a performer is highly sensitive to the audience and reacts to their needs in an instantaneous and adequate manner. It is, however, unrealistic to expect sustenance of this attunement throughout the whole performance. Whilst there is a constant negotiation between ‘listening’ and

‘speaking/responding’, they do not necessarily coincide. Different phases in the performance require different accents in the act of guiding. When a new phase arrives, it is crucial to provide clarity on the frame into which the audience is stepping. The performer indicates what is coming next and sets the frame of interaction. It is an invitation, a speech act if you would, to which the audience has to give an answer: an answer that is not limited to ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

2.2 AFFECTIVE ARTICULATION

In line with my previous statement, guiding can exceed verbal conveyance and should not be regarded as always ‘clear’ or ‘transparent’. Rather, I conceptualise guiding as a highly responsive ‘articulation’. French sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour uses the concept of articulation in replacement of ‘statement’ as ‘what cannot be said can be articulated’ (Latour 2004, 210). Latour explored the idea of the articulate subject in the 2004 article *How to talk about the body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies*. In this article, he reflects on the role of the body in science and learning. He describes to have a body as ‘to learn to be affected, meaning “effectuated”, moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or non-humans (Latour 2004, 205). In accordance with this dynamic definition, an articulate subject, to Latour, is someone who learns to be affected by others. In contrast, someone inarticulate always feels, acts, and says the same thing, despite the actions of others. To be articulate means neither to be literate, nor to talk with authority, but to allow yourself to be affected by difference. He continues that a subject only becomes ‘interesting, deep, profound, worthwhile’ when it resonates with others. Interestingly, Latour combines the idea of resonance with difference, as he claims it is about being ‘effected, moved, put into motion by new entities whose differences are registered in new and unexpected ways’ (Latour 2004, 210). Resonance, in terms of physics, is a transfer of energy with maximal responsiveness that occurs when the force between different systems moves at the same frequency (D’Amato 2009, 54–55). Although this equal force correlates well with the non-hierarchical idea of power in guiding, I build on Latour’s inclusion of difference in the concept of resonance and affect.

To come back to the idea that the act of listening does not prevent a guide from articulating invitations, I want to stress that an attentiveness to difference does not necessarily impede the course of an interactive performance. The work of Myriam Lefkowitz and Sarah John is devised in such a way that it allows for a multitude of reactions. As each action affects another, unexpected reactions of the audience do not only inspire altered invitations; any invitation by the performer will always incite manifold reactions, however subtle in their differences. Taking into account different reactions of an audience (due to any reason) can make things possible within the frame of the performance that the performer had never conceived. This heterogeneity is filled with a potential that conjures up Spanish sociologist Alberto Corsín Jiménez’s idea of *prototyping* (Corsín Jiménez 2014). Whilst diverging from the creation of artefacts, Corsín Jiménez thinks of frames, contexts, or protocols as a prototype for sociality. Instead of focusing on reproduction, he claims that the prototype provides the opportunity for compossibility. In that sense, the prototype becomes a mould that generates a myriad of possibilities of interaction.

Even though I consider the idea of prototyping highly captivating with respect to interactive practice, a performance's ability to incorporate multiplicity cannot be entirely attributed to its frame and protocols. Also essential to the potential courses of a performance are the individuals working within these frames as performers and the manner in which they perceive their role as a guide. Instead of thinking how difference can hamper the outcome of a phase, I want to redirect our view to how attentiveness to difference enables the performer to articulate invitations that are non-instrumental. When we regard such an articulation as non-instrumental, we can think of it as proliferating, generating multiple options without ceasing to register differences. Up until now, I have used the common notion of 'invitation', highly popular in performative work, that employs audience participation (White 2013), as to nominate what a performer articulates. Proceeding, I will abandon this notion in favour of 'proposition', concordant with Latour's conception of it. Drawing on Belgian philosopher Isabelle Stenger's reading of Whitehead, Latour thinks of a proposition as the expression of a position without definitive authority. Through its claim of a *pro*-position, it accepts the negotiation of itself into a *com*-position without losing its solidity (Latour 2004, 212).

2.3 DISCOMFORTING INARTICULATION

The terminology of 'proposition' and 'composition' is exceptionally convenient within the context of performing arts. Furthermore, it suits our focus on a performer's capacity to guide, as both words imply actions and skills. This brings us to the practice of French artist Myriam Lefkowitz, who has made guided walks her core practice. She is most well known for her project *Walk, Hands, Eyes*, in which she shortly integrates in a city, trains locals in guiding, and collaboratively explores the neighbourhood in order to offer a series of performative walks.

According to Julie Perrin, the choreographic act in Myriam Lefkowitz's work *Walk, Hands, Eyes* consists of shaping sensitive experience. These experiences are construed through constant different, singular approaches. By playing on the viable combinations of sensing and acting, Lefkowitz achieves a composition of 'the denseness of the sensitive' (Perrin 2017, 2). This description of Lefkowitz's practice strongly reverberates with Latour's thought on articulation, which is not necessarily transparent. While Latour acknowledges that to have a body is learning to be affected, he does not elaborate on the function of listening. Nonetheless, as indicated by Perrin, this skill of listening or sensing is constantly negotiated with the feat of acting, or as I have claimed, articulating. The guide's attention, as well as the participant's, consists of noticing what composes their situation and trying to invent ways to respond to it. It is not only this combination of sensing and articulating that makes Lefkowitz's practice captivating in terms of guiding. It is Lefkowitz's exploration of both the artistic potential of her practice as well as its deadlocks that proves it to be an entrancing case study. Lefkowitz asserts, for example, that one is only able to reposition within a situation and potentially recalibrate the interaction if they shift their attention to what is blocking them. "*If you are not committed to this conscious observation, you will not encounter unsurmountable numbers of unblocking. Rather you will simply repeat to schemes you are used to, even if they*

are producing 'toxic' effects" (Lefkowitz and Lavergne 2014, 8). Lefkowitz absorbs these moments of unblocking and discomfort into her practice as a guide. When one does not, they will become an inarticulate subject themselves and will quit their responsive awareness.

Latour's conception of the inarticulate subject aligns with what Myriam Lefkowitz considers the 'free subject', a position she considers an impeding factor in her practice. She describes this subject as 'someone who thinks they do not depend on or are alienated from anything as they are singular and they make their proper decisions' (Lefkowitz and Lavergne 2014, 7). Oftentimes, the potential of a performance is hindered because the guide feels compelled to take on the role of someone who is dominating, imposing something that the participant does not want to experience. Lefkowitz continues that when this occurs, the participant will spend their time refusing anything she imposes. This imposition is not intended as such by the performer. Rather, their propositions transform into impositions. When a participant chooses the position of inarticulation, they do not allow to be affected and therefore refuse anything, not perceiving invitations as propositions, but as impositions. Lefkowitz mentions that this refusal is not abnormal: "*who would accept to experience something that is imposed on them, despite their wishes? Resistance in that sense, is of utmost normality as it follows the logic of someone who makes decisions by themselves, a free man*" (Lefkowitz and Lavergne 2014, 7). When this happens, Lefkowitz says that whatever she tries to do to transmit 'you know, you are imposing things on me as well', there will be a vast chance that together, they will stay stuck. Ultimately, she will be tainted by the state of the other.

It should be stressed that discomfort does not equal resistance, nor does it necessarily convert into inarticulateness. Myriam Lefkowitz devises that perhaps it is exactly when one is 'out of step' (Fr. *déphasé*) that they recompose themselves. This often happens with audience members; a moment of imbalance or doubt leads to engagement in what is happening. Perhaps even without being aware of it, these moments of discomfort are instances in which one has the opportunity to readjust. We can identify a similar potential in the experience of discomfort by the performer in their role as guide. Lefkowitz makes this concrete by providing the example of a staircase, for when there are steps, the guide has to wake up – 'the environment obligates you to awaken' (Evans and Lefkowitz 2014, 11). While part of guiding is often described as 'wandering', going on a drift with the audience, moments of discomfort should be taken on as opportunities to re-engage; these moments should not reinforce assumptions of an audience's experience. Discomfort presents itself as an interpellation in which the performer can choose to engage with or ignore it. When a guide's discomfort provokes them to fear uncharted territory and prompt them to finish an experience on 'auto-pilot', they will have tricked themselves into becoming inarticulate. Moreover, their inarticulation will have incited them to claim power for instrumental ends. Recalling Arendt's conception of power, Ben Evans (a guide in Lefkowitz's practice) asserts that if there is an instance in which he appropriates power, the process of reciprocity ends, as well as the walk. A guide retains to power after all, 'not as to become more powerful, but as to generate potency (Fr. *force*) – not my power, but a power that is co-constructed' (Evans and Lefkowitz 2014, 11).

3. DISCOMFORT IN TRAINING AS A GUIDE

Hitherto I have established a basic understanding of the performer's ability to guide in interactive performance, with the support of Latour's conception of the articulate subject and accounts of Myriam Lefkowitz's practice. Anyone familiar with interactive art practice is aware of the importance of an audience during a creative process. In order to discover their capabilities, the frames devised by the artist require interaction with an audience. As disclosed earlier, this process of discovery does not cease after a performance has premiered, but continues to unlock a variety of audience reactions at each enactment. Nevertheless, a basic probe into the modalities and limits of a framework proves indispensable. This interaction with an audience during a performance or a try-out does not only present itself as necessary to test the framework; it is also one of the best training grounds a performer can think of. However, one is not constantly engaged in a creative process, nor does one always have the resources. In such a case, how can a performer train their guiding skills and find themselves in genuine discomfoting encounters?

This section accounts on a laboratory in 'flocking', a somatic method often exploited in dance training. This laboratory was proposed by Sarah John (who is associated with Danish theatre company *Carte Blanche*) to a miscellaneous group of young people from Denmark, France and Belgium. All participants, whether with an artistic and/or academic background, had experience in embodied interactive performing arts, often in corporation with *Carte Blanche*, located in Viborg. The practice of flocking can aid a performer in exploring their 'porousness', expanding the range of their articulation and listening from one person to many. In order to appreciate the qualities of this collective practice, I will introduce the theoretical concept of 'responsible combodying', fathomed through Akira Ikemi's concept of responsive combodying and Joan Tronto's ontology of care.

3.1 MORE CONCEPTS: FROM AFFECT TO COMBODYING

3.1.1 RESPONSIVE COMBODYING

In his article *Sunflowers, Sardines and Responsive Combodying: Three Perspectives on Embodiment* (2014), Japanese psychologist Akira Ikemi builds on the phenomenology of the implicit by American philosopher Eugene Gendlin. Through an imagery of nature, he elucidates on the notion of responsive combodying, which he coined as processing-generating living "together with" (-com) other beings, newly at every moment, prior to our reflexive awareness (Ikemi 2014, 9). Ikemi proposes this conception in response to Gendlin's rejection of the commonly held phenomenological view that knowledge is acquired through our senses. Gendlin favours a shift towards the interaction of the body with its environment, asserting that the body is affected, whether we perceive it as such or not. He uses the concept of the plant-body to talk about this interaction. A plant knows exactly how to live and grow, even though it lacks perceptive input channels and thus does not rely on its senses. It does not have information, it *is* information; it organises this input in such a manner that it generates its own living, its body a processing. More concretely, a plant is the information as its body is made

of soil, water, air and light – the very elements that contain information to continue its existence. The body is an order that is generated from itself, processing whatever information it has (or is) – that includes memory and acquisitions (Ikemi 2014, 20–23).

While these natural phenomena provide a useful basis of reflection, Ikemi continues to assert that the context becomes more complicated when we look at the human body. Humans live at least as much in a symbolic world as in a natural world. We live in and with symbols; they are within us and affect us. We communicate with words, which have culture and history in them as they are constituted from and affected by it (Ikemi 2014, 25). Although Ikemi acknowledges our awareness of the symbolic, he maintains that responsive combodying happens pre-reflexively and needs explication if people want to reflect on it. Thus, the explication appears as a translation device to render combodying operable. Moreover, Ikemi claims that ‘reflexive awareness generates what one is’; combodying responds to our awareness in such a way that it advances the body into something different than what it once was (Ikemi 2014, 28). While stating that everything is affected by everything, Ikemi chooses to merely focus on the effect of the reflexive explication on combodying and not in reverse. Furthermore, Ikemi seems to overlook that we can forget something as easily as we have become aware of it, which equally affects one’s combodying.

Ikemi attempts to discard dualistic thinking by introducing notions as the plant-body and flocks. Nonetheless, he reaffirms binaries by insisting on the explication of the implicit, respectively relating to the cultured world of humans and the somatic realm of nature. Although Ikemi’s understanding of ‘responsive combodying’ is somewhat beguiling, I do appreciate the potential of the concept. When we regard the notion through Latour’s conception of the articulate body, rather as in need of explication, it becomes more suited to my argument. Latour reminds us that articulation is not purely a logocentric term, nor is it merely ‘body talk’; it finds expression in many forms (Latour 2004, 212). Articulations are not necessarily unequivocal and can be ascribed different meanings depending on different and expanding systems of knowledge. On this issue, Ikemi and Latour concur; while Ikemi discusses expanding systems of knowledge (Ikemi 2014, 27), Latour describes a learning process as follows: ‘the more contrasts you add, *the more differences and mediations you become sensible to*’ (Latour 2004, 210). Similar to Latour’s example of how one can become more articulate in terms of perceiving scents, Ikemi gives the example of recognising stiffness in one’s shoulders. You may know you have stiff shoulders, but when a trainer asks you to relax the muscles around your shoulder blades, you may only then notice the tension in a specific area. Only when you are shown how to train those muscles will you be able to direct your attention to them and find a way to relax. Similarly, one can become aware of articulated propositions within a group or by an audience member. As I have argued, a guide does not, however, merely respond to propositions of an audience, they also take on the responsibility to make propositions.

3.1.2 RESPONSIBLE COMBODYING

A guide observes, tunes into their attentiveness, remains responsive through reciprocity. Due to the active articulations of the guide, I propose the notion of ‘responsible combodying’ in preference to ‘responsive combodying’ to dissociate with some of Ikemi’s chasms. The choice for ‘responsible’ stems from a poetic interpretation of the word, both implying a response-ability (as responsiveness remains an important quality of the guide) and a duty of ‘care’. We can analyse this notion through Joan Tronto’s ontology of care, which comprises five phases: *caring about*, i.e. recognising an unmet need for care; *caring for*, i.e. taking responsibility to meet that need; *care-giving*, i.e. the actual physical work of providing care; *care-receiving*, i.e. the assessment of the effectiveness of the caring act(s); and *caring with*, i.e. the practice of care (both caring needs and acts) that is consistent with democratic commitments to justice, equality, and freedom for all (Tronto 2010, 160; 2013, 22–23).

Although one can stick to a specific phase of care in a concrete situation, these phases do not necessarily occur chronologically. Moreover, they are closely interrelated. This reciprocity is an important element of Tronto’s ontology, as she considers people at once recipients and providers of care. This concurring provision and reception manifests itself mainly in Tronto’s writing on the fourth phase of care, care-receiving. This phase requires the quality of responsiveness; to each act of care, some kind of response will emerge from the person, group, animal, plant, environment, or thing that has been cared for (Tronto 2013, 35). While the care receiver may consciously formulate a response, sometimes they cannot. Therefore, the provider of care should be attentive to any kind of articulation that is conveyed, making ‘to listen’ or ‘to sense’ an important aspect of this responsiveness. Tronto continues that, in having met previous caring needs, new needs will undoubtedly arise, ‘thus the process continues’ (Tronto 2013, 23, 30–35). The continuation of this process, when transferred to the context of interactive performance, reveals itself in actions and propositions by the guide who take on the responsibility to meet a certain need. It is important to note that, similarly to how I have described power, Tronto considers power relations in care not as dyad, but as much more complex.

3.1.3 REVISTING PRESUPPOSITIONS

I have constructed the concept of the guide’s response-ability from Tronto’s ontology of care. When we consider interactive performance as an ecology of care, it is important to consider these acts of care in the most basic sense: relating to somatic articulations. The interactive practices of Sarah John and Myriam Lefkowitz do not, after all, have a therapeutic aim – an insinuation and association that is oftentimes made. Furthermore, I agree with Tronto’s affirmation that not all care should be defined as good care. Alike to sociologist George Homans’ caution towards a normative dimension of interaction (Homans 1950), assumptions of care’s irrefutable beneficence may mislead us to ignore in what ways ‘care can function discursively to obscure injustices’ (Tronto 2013, 24). While this general statement relates to Tronto’s fifth phase of care, caring with, in a context of democracy, it is applicable to the relation between a guide and an audience member as well. For, although I consider power as

non-hierarchical, when a proposition is made by an inarticulate guide who believes their caring propositions are certain to be well-received due to good intentions, their power may instantly become instrumental. This is often the case in immersive theatre where an audience takes part in a narrative, participating in order to serve the script (Machon 2013; Shearing 2015; Biggin 2017). Furthermore, I link the inarticulate subject to a feeling of ease which, drawing on Scott Kiesling, I conceive to possibly encourage hegemonies (Kiesling 2018, 18). Discomfort may as well reinforce normative structures of hegemony when it is not addressed. However, it could introduce a discontinuity of power relations, destabilising the bearings of the person in power who was at ease and believed to be in tune with their environment. As I have argued, it is important for a guide to be attentive to discomfort of the audience. Based on the role of discomfort for people in positions of privilege, it is, however, equally important for the guide to remain attentive to their own discomfort.

Ethics of discomfort are not novel in pedagogics (Berlak 2004; Boler 1999; 2004; Boler and Zembylas 2003; Faulkner and Crowhurst 2014; Kishimoto and Mwangi 2009; Mintz 2013; Zembylas and McGlynn 2012). Cypriot educational scientist Michalinos Zembylas considers the potential of an ethics of discomfort as a caring practice in education. I too regard the affective qualities of discomfort as a source of intelligence performers can learn from. Rather than adopting his plea to place students in discomforting spaces as an educational tool, I examine the flocking lab in which performers themselves have consciously embraced a space of potential discomfort. I want to emphasise that discomfort was never thematised before or during the lab as an important element of performer training. All participants do, however, voluntarily engage in a collective process that they know might entail some sort of risk of being affected. Throughout the flocking process, it dawned on me this risk often derives from affects of discomfort, which we have seen are significant in the development of a performer's guiding skills. Zembylas assumes 'that discomforting feelings are important in challenging dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain social inequities' (Zembylas 2017, 8). He draws on French philosopher Michel Foucault's ethics of discomfort to make the claim that they are the 'grounds on which to critique deeply held assumptions about ourselves and others' (Zembylas 2017, 9). Discomfort implies after all 'never to consent to being completely comfortable with one's own presuppositions' (Foucault 1994, 448).

3.2 CASE STUDY: A FLOCKING LAB

3.2.1 FLOCKING PRACTICE

Before discussing how discomfort informed the performers during the laboratory, I will describe the practice of flocking. This training method stems from observations of the phenomenon in the natural world, animating for example bird flocks or schools of sardines, which Akira Ikemi describes as a body that can both scatter into and merge with other bodies instantly (Ikemi 2014, 24). Some of the main features of flocking are its (a) uniform density, particularly when on the move, (b) polarisation, with all members facing in the same direction, and the (c) freedom of the individual to move with respect to their neighbours (Lebar Bajec, Zimik, and Mraz 2005). While these basic features were present in the flocking

lab, Sarah John equally included the key principles of listening to the group – what it needs, what it wants, how it behaves – and responding whilst being faithful to oneself – the way the performer feels, what they accept and what they do not want to do. It is not about mimicking one’s movements or even translating one’s movements into your own different body. German-American theatre researcher and disability activist Petra Kuppers describes it as ‘feeling yourself entering into the energy lines that emerge from someone else’ (Kuppers 2015, 518). It is a ‘mediation of connection’ in which there are occurrences of attunement as well as moments of tuning in: ‘waiting, watchfully with eyes all over my body’ (Kuppers 2015, 518).

In an inexperienced group, flocking will often manifest itself as a ‘leader flock’, a flock that follows the movements of at least one leader. This leader is a body, not influenced by any of its flock mates, that influences at least one other. This position can be linked to the inarticulate body, making statements and providing clarity through ‘leading’, without being affected by another. One of the rules relates to the transfer of leadership: the person on the edge of the group, who cannot see anyone else, leads. One’s eyes should always align with the direction of their shoulders. This rule is integrated as to make clear who is bearing the lead. Leadership relocates when the group turns, looking in the same direction as one’s shoulders. While doing this exercise in pairs, the moments of uncertainty in leadership are still modest, in contrast to bigger flocks where the variations and moments of discrepancy in leadership grow. This sometimes leads to the group splitting up into smaller packs or tiny flocks merging together.

When training responsible combodying, performers will gradually shift towards a leaderless flock in which each body is influenced by at least one of its flock mates, becoming liquid and in tune with each other. While in the leader flock the position of one body to another is often of importance for the movement (the one up front taking on the role of leader), the leaderless flock is held together by the concept of ‘interaction’. This concept introduces the relationship, rather than the position, of the bodies and comprises that two individuals who are close enough to potentially influence each other become members of the same flock (Heppner and Grenander 1990). Rather than follow the rules of leading and following, the flock becomes articulate and responsive. The congregating bodies move in apparent synchrony, the source of the impetus being the group itself. Therefore, flocking is an exercise in negotiation and learning to exert people’s complementarity to achieve resonance.

3.2.2 A RESEARCHER’S POSITIONALITY

Important to the analysis of discomfort in the flocking lab is my position as a researcher. Although I do not denounce the notion of participant observer, I refer to myself as ‘participant researcher’ in the context of the flocking laboratory. Withal I align with Danish educational scientist Cathrine Hasse’s view on the discrepancy between the position of observer and participant (Hasse 2015, 116). Her congruent perspective contrasts the common oxymoronic discourse on participant observation (Tonkin 1984, 216; Davies 1999, 72; DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 28) that has been accumulated since Bronislaw Malinowski (°1884-1942) and

Margaret Mead (°1901-1978). Many ethnographers have claimed they varyingly observe and participate and that these activities cannot be pursued simultaneously. Hasse, on the contrary, asserts that, at once, all participants observe and all observers participate. Therefore, the position of participant observer does not merely retain to the researcher, but to the research subjects as well. Nonetheless, our perception is fundamentally influenced by how we participate.

Although the participant researcher strives for equal footing with other participants, from an ethical point of view, participant researchers should still always present themselves as researchers. This, because the researcher's objective is not merely to participate in the practice, but rather to have it as the object of one's research interest. Even if the specific topic has not been defined yet, the participant researcher's engagement always stretches over both the empirical and analytical field. Furthermore, though the researcher learns through the same positioned bodily experiences as other participants, they remain members of the analytical field with other engagements than those in the empirical field (Hasse 2015, 125). The role of participant researcher has similarities with participatory or accompanying methodology (Berghold and Thomas 2012; Refslund et al. 2016). For example, they are all willing to be engaged in other people's activities and therefore seek positions through which it is possible to engage in the organisation's everyday life. Rather than imposing research questions, questions arise from being engaged in the process as a participant researcher. In other words, a participant researcher abandons inquiry that is defined by the premises of the analytical field in order to converge within the empirical one. These questions take shape as the participant researcher learns about the consequences of one's engagement in a particular practice; inquiries that would not be learned without one's awareness of such engagements and consequences (Hasse 2015).

Whilst I chose the position of participant researcher for myself, I was repeatedly made aware of the different position I held within the lab. These confrontations resonate with Hasse's description of the negotiation of a researcher's position that always transpires on the premises of the empirical field. Other participants must, after all, to some extent accept the participant researcher as someone who is a legitimate participant in their culture (Hasse 2015, 121). 'Their culture' at the flocking lab was not, however, pre-existing, neither as it was unanimously agreed upon. This led to participants reacting in various ways to my presence during the exercises. The participants who I was already familiar with took no issue to my participation in the flocking as my presence had become or always had been commonplace and was not necessarily linked to my current employment as a researcher. They knew I was not trained as a professional actor and that I had a different, more 'illiterate' way of bodily expression. For some of the participants I did not know beforehand, my sometimes subtle articulation during flocking exercises was troublesome. This had to do with a confusion of my function as a researcher and the observational qualities of my presence as a participant during the flocking. In other words, a mix-up between participation and observation led to a discomforting feeling.

Reflecting on my position as both participant and researcher in the flocking lab, I want to note a poetic similarity between the notions of observation and listening or sensing— withholding while being attentive to what is happening. Similarly, action, response or articulation have a close correlation as well. Notice how, even though I make an argument to think oppositions together, I do not contrast observation with participation, but with acting. In the wake of Cathrine Hasse’s merger of ‘observation’ and ‘participation’, I would like to introduce the notion of participation in congruence with responsible combodying. This notion does not only suit the academic who interacts with their research subject, but eloquently covers the interaction among performers, and between audience and performers as well. Participation therefore includes both observation and action; it propels a person to listen and respond— to be attentive, to sense whilst being articulate and articulating propositions.

4.2 IGNORING DISCOMFORT

The subjects of ‘negotiation’ and ‘being affected’ were at the core of every conversation during the flocking lab. There were, for example, discussions on how people rebel against the rule of copying, as they consider, in accordance with Koppers’ conception, flocking to be about feeling people’s intentions or impulses: *“I am not following your movement, but I am following your intention”*. Other people, however, claimed it was not so much about the rule itself, but about the choice what to do with rules. One could insist on copying and explore what emerges from that or commit to their rebellious dynamic, fluctuating between sticking to the rules and breaking them. *“Something to relate to: that is of importance. How you relate to it can be very different, but you need something to relate to”*. Furthermore, the participants stated that the rules were their language: *“We need something to have in common, to come back to when we wander off and get lost and get confused”*.

On the account of one’s articulation, a participant claimed one’s choice for action implied a moment of non-responsiveness, as *“when you choose to run, there is a second, when the choice is made, when you are not listening. It is not necessarily a bad thing; it is just a choice”*. As I have argued, this negotiation between making propositions and listening is a constant process, present in guiding. Another participant asserted that *“hesitation is extremely obvious: it sticks out. Whereas a clear decision, even though it might be against what is going on, does not stick out in the same way”*. The notion of hesitation led to a discussion on how to embrace one’s uncertainty and insecurities. During the first flocking, there had not been a clear division of people who were participating in the flock and the possibility to ‘step out’ in order to observe. In the discussion afterwards, I asserted that at one point it felt as if I had become, with two other participants, a flock in observing, rather than in moving, while remaining related to what was happening around us. From this assessment, the possibility to step out was introduced. For some people, this led to feeling a more intense connection to their fellow flockers: they felt more part of the flock due to the distinction between people observing and ‘actioning’.

This need for a separation in order to see the outlines of possibility resonated strongly with one participant who testified she could see ‘[I] was not ‘in’ during the second flock, that ‘[I]

was observing', which made her feel insecure. This reaction came after the clear rules of being 'in' and 'out'. Another participant accounted on that same instant that they thought 'it was very daring how [I] moved'. They considered it deeply interesting, for it revealed how everything has an influence while also providing the opportunity to question 'how we can care less about our judgements'. As intended, I experienced this moment as participating or 'actioning' in the flock, despite my position as a researcher. While the latter participant recognised an opportunity of reconsideration, the response of the first participant's insecurity about my availability "*was the easy way out, instead of exploring what that meant, 'she is just not in'*". [...] "*I turned you off in my antenna, because I thought you were observing. When there is doubt about it, that does not feel good*". Sarah John took this occasion to indicate the difference between 'taking the easy decision' and 'going in'. In addition, she shared her curiosity of how to make more decisions to commit to something, or, in Latour's terms, to decide to be articulate. How can one be articulate while engaging with someone else's articulation, even though it is strange or discomforting? How can one revisit their discomfort to someone else's in/action and still interpret the other's un/moving as an articulation? How might one refrain from shutting off the presence of a body and become inarticulate themselves?

Sarah John linked this discussion to emergence – "*how something new can appear, how to go from rules and frames to something no one had thought would occur*" – and a radical shift of identity – "*in which we consider to be one, without losing one's own autonomy and own responsibility. An identity in which we have to care more desperately than ever before; in which everything is affecting and everything counts. We should be able to do anything while remaining attentive to the delicacy of the flock*". This confidence in the capacity of a collective, couple or relation is shared by Myriam Lefkowitz, who perceives her artistic practice as a way to study and practice attention and enquire into the question of care. She claims: "*When you are touched by a frequency that emanates from someone or the environment; that changes something in your own constitution. Everything you are in relation with transforms your own organisation while being a guide*" (Evans and Lefkowitz 2014, 11).

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has proposed 'responsible combodying' as a comprehensive notion to describe the main qualities a performer needs to guide an audience in interactive performance. These qualities comprise the reciprocal skills of sensing or listening and articulation or action.

I drew on Latour's dynamic definition of the body as 'learning to be affected' in order to elude mind-body dualisms. Furthermore, his concept of the in/articulate subject proved useful to reflect on (a) how a performer makes propositions to an audience as well as (b) how an audience can choose to accept, follow, resist, refuse, doubt or make a proposition themselves. These negotiations between propositions, different reactions and feelings of discomfort inform a performer of the situation at hand. In other words, discomfort experienced by the audience as well as the performer functions as an interpellation. Being out of step allows one to awaken and shows an opportunity to reconsider and re-engage. When a performer chooses to

ignore discomfort, they are at risk of reinforcing assumptions of an audience's experience and moving through the performance as an inarticulate subject. This subject no longer engages in non-hierarchical power structures but uses their position as a means to an end— in this case, literally the end of the performance. Rather than aiming for resonance, the guide must attune to the changes in the environment and difference in general.

Latour's terminology is rich in affective flavour, but lacks a serious consideration of the movement of listening. To answer to this absence, I have included Akira Ikemi's idea of responsive combodying, which implies the quality of receptiveness. In turn, Ikemi fails to embrace a truly affective conception of combodying, claiming that each implicit information from the somatic realm needs an explication through the world of the symbolic. Though both theorists acknowledge that every body has the potential to affect another, their terminology proved insufficient to describe the essential reciprocal quality of guiding. For this purpose, Joan Tronto's ontology of care proved effective. Akin to Akira and Latour, she asserts that one is simultaneously the recipient and provider of care. Though the expression of care may strongly differ, one is never solely in a position of caregiving or –receiving. Tronto discerns five phases of care, among which the fourth phase requires responsiveness of the care receiver as to give feedback on the act of care. This phase launches a whole new enactment of care, instigated by the care giver's responsibility to act to one's need. With the aim of merging listening – crucial in the fourth phase – with acting – initiated in the second phase –, I chose the notion of 'responsible combodying' due to its dual meaning of taking charge and listening to another's response whilst incorporating the somatic.

Finally, the performer's quality of responsible combodying was explored through the practice of flocking. Not only could one argue flocking is a somatic manifestation of the concept, it also allowed us to consider performer training for interactive performance. While in the first section, I had established that engaging with discomfort informs a performer's guiding, one could still wonder how a performer trains to deal with such ordeals if they are not encountering an audience. After all, a performer is not always touring, engaged in a creative process or has the means to organise try-outs. Training with peers, embracing frames of risk, can provide useful contexts to submerge oneself in discomforting situations.

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