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mentoring and coaching platform *double* of the Migros-Kulturprozent.

La Becque, La Tour-De-Peilz, Switzerland, 2023.



Photo by Aurélien Haslebacher.

Mentee: Sam Musy
Mentor: Tanja Erhart

Residency Overview

Tanja and Sam delved deeply into the intersections of art, activism, and access within dance.The residency with Tanja Erhart provided Sam Musy with a collaborative and exploratory environment to develop an artistic language that centered around sensory experiences, and accessible dance practices. Tanja Erhart & Sam Musy researched pleasure in movement, particularly stimming, from Sam's lived experience.What is stimming? A stim is a repetitive self-stimulating behavior. «The term «stim» was introduced by the autistic community to reform what is generally referred to by professionals as «stereotypy» or «repetitive motor movement».

Sam's reflections illustrate how movement serves as both refuge and communication, a way to reconnect with the self and challenge traditional constructs of performance. Tanja shows a sensitivity to shared vulnerabilities and the intricacies of facilitating space and time in ways that honor each individual's access needs and personal rhythms. They explored themes of safety, space, and the pleasure of movement with an emphasis on access, inviting a radical thinking of how dance can accommodate diverse bodyminds. Through this, Sam reclaims stimming, aiming to celebrate its potential. Tanja's insights show her commitment to fostering inclusivity and finding innovative ways to make artistic spaces supportive and adaptable, reflecting the broader goals of crip theory and pleasure activism (à la Adrienne Maree Brown)

Tanja's and Sam's exchange encapsulates a commitment redefining what dance spaces can be places for rest, to dismantling ableism, centering care and agency, and exploration, and empowerment.

Artistic Development Goals

To Create a Unique Artistic Language

The mentorship aimed to support Sam's exploration of movement that is organic to his neurodivergent experience. Together with Tanja, Sam focused on establishing a movement vocabulary that embraces stimming as dance, allowing for repetition, rhythm, and sensory responsiveness.

To Enhance Accessibility Through Relaxed Performance Design

With an audience in mind that includes mad and neurodivergent individuals, Sam's work focuses on a model for "relaxed performances." These are designed to be mindful of sensory triggers, create adaptable spaces, and encourage freedom of movement, supporting a sense of welcome and safety for all attendees.

Residency Process and Structure:

Daily Practice and Routine

The residency maintained a structured yet flexible daily routine, which proved effective for maintaining balance and ensuring sufficient rest. Mornings often began with separate dance sessions, where Sam and Tanja alternated music selections, encouraging independent exploration while exposing each other to new sounds and movement cues. They also incorporated time for check-ins and check-outs, fostering honest reflection on experiences, challenges, and progress.

Collaborative Sessions

One of the highlights of the residency was the shared contact dance sessions, which allowed for open communication and non-verbal expression. Through dance, Sam explored stimming movements on a larger, more intentional scale, allowing previously covert or minimized movements to become central to his expressive range. Additionally, moments of rest, reflection, and shared discussion created a rhythm to the days, balancing activity with restorative practices.

Space for Individual Exploration

The physical setup of the residency venue supported Sam's access needs by designating specific retreat spaces. Sam established a personal corner in the dance area, marking it with tape and placing comfort items within it. This "safe zone" provided a consistent space for Sam to center himself when needed. Similarly, a shared rest area equipped with individual mattresses gave both Sam and Tanja a place to rest, reflect, and share personal insights.

Reflection and Documentation



Throughout the residency, Sam and Tanja reflected on their evolving processes and shared memories, creating a reservoir of insight into how physical and emotional space can be navigated in non-hierarchical, mutually supportive ways. Tanja's experience with Crip spacetime and Sam's personal reflections on his residency fostered trust and creative flow, allowing each to adapt to the needs of the other, while also addressing the complexities of vulnerability and creative exchange in the mentorship dynamic.

Memorable Moments & Reflections:

Joint dance sessions created some of the residency's most impactful memories.
-« I felt like I could really open up» said Sam,
- «be vulnerable about my doubts and «imposter syndrom»
It was very valuable to share about limitations, chronic pain, age. I used to feel «too old» and «not athletic enough» to be a dancer.» Moments of synchrony and spontaneity reinforced the importance of shared experiences and mutual support.Conversations around identity, vulnerability, and lived experiences became pivotal, allowing Sam and Tanja to explore the nuances of mentorship and creative collaboration
-«.I was curious exploring non hierarchical ways of working and exchanging our Crip knowledge and wisdoms.» shared Tanja. «I was insecure at times, if what I offer is of any significance at all. Through time and creating our Crip space time (a la Margaret Price) together and for ourselves, I felt I could also relax into it and let things unfold. The mentoring was a fabulous guide in finding and letting trust flourish: trusting each other, the process and the unknown. »
-« What were the challenges? » Asked Sam.
Tanja:- « Navigating space and time together and alone, being vulnerable in front of each other and trusting each other. »
-« How do you find home in your bodymind? » asked Tanja,
- « Through repetitive movements, especially rocking motions, and breath patterns. It's like leaving the classroom. The minimum scale assessments for allistics is through the roof for me. When I dance I'm out of the exam room. It's like recess from being intelligible. Then I begin to perceive myself louder. »
- « How do you connect your stimming with dancing? » asked Tanja.
- «For me, stimming is like a covert operation, a way to sneak dance into my everyday life» Sam replied, «I want to reverse that. I want stimming to be to be the main event. I's like stimming never had room to grow in me, because it's primary purpose was to be unconspicuous. I want my stims to have room to grow, to be blatant, repetitive, big, loud, shameless. »
- « Which ideas would you like to develop further? »
-« I would like to develop further the classification of stimming movements, extend my understanding of it. continue creating a vocabulary for it. I would like to organize workshops around stimming and unmasking. I would like to perform in accessible venues with relaxed performance settings. »
-« How do you want to take up space? »
- « I want to take up space with my support needs. Regarding accommodations on the locations and support with planning. I want to take up space by feeling entitled to ask for more time to process and rest. I want to create projects with other dancers. I want to learn to take space with other people. Learn to perceive the quality of the « dance-together » and be more attuned the other's body language & emotions. »
- « Tanja, what ideas are fueling you now? »
- « Incorporating stim toys and different textures, maybe also pen, paper and post-its, into my rest- and retreat spaces in the dance studio as well as on stage and in the audience. »
-« How do you want to take up space? » asked Tanja
-« I want to take up space with my support needs. Regarding accommodations on the locations and support with planning. I want to take up space by feeling entitled to ask for more time to process and rest. I want to create projects with other dancers. »

Future Directions:

Following the residency, Sam aims to further develop:
Workshops on Stimming and unmasking: Sam plans to initiate workshops where participants can explore stimming as a form of dance, creating a shared, accessible vocabulary around neurodivergent movements.

Relaxed Performance Protocols: Building on insights from the residency, Sam will continue to refine his protocols for accessible, relaxed performances.

Audience Feedback Integration: Sam envisions an evolving performance series where audience feedback is directly integrated, ensuring that the work remains relevant and responsive to crip, neurodivergent and mad community members' experiences.

Conclusion:

Sam Musy's residency with Tanja Erhart has yielded a transformative experience, advancing his understanding of accessibility, artistic autonomy, and neurodivergent embodiment. The residency provided essential groundwork for his future workshops and performances, all of which are driven by a deep commitment to inclusivity, self-expression, and community engagement.

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