

The Potential in Obstacles

Aspects of Resistance in Art Education-Mediated Performance Practice

Lisa Epp in conversation with BBB Johannes Deimling

LISA: This interview will focus on the experiences I had during PAS | Performance Art Studies #80 "Course of Action" in Nijmegen, The Netherlands, which I attended as part of my internship. Since I study art education, I am interested in how educational processes work in detail. My questions will mostly aim to understand the inner learning processes in performance art and how to follow and enable them for didactical purposes. This way, people who are also interested in participating in PAS can get an idea of what they can learn during your courses. Before we begin, I would like to clarify that I approach educational processes with a specific perspective. I believe that these processes always require students to create, and therefore, are inherently creative. To initiate such a creative learning process, we need an obstacle or resistance. This is part of my philosophy of education, where resistance challenges you to find an inner motivation to work through it. I am also researching resistance in performance practice as an educational potential. This forms the background for the questions I will ask you today.

Let us start with the first question, which is about body experience and form. What changes in body perception during performance actions compared to everyday life?

JOHANNES: What can drastically change is one's awareness. And yes, 'awareness' is such a big word, but in the end, it comes down to awareness. Awareness informs attitude, how we behave, act, react, how we feel, and how we decide in certain moments and situations.

The way we use the body in performance does not always follow everyday logic. What you do in your everyday life usually has a certain function or aim for survival - you need to cook, brush your teeth, go to the toilet, etc. These actions serve a practical purpose to keep your organism alive. Not all actions, but most of them. In the arts, we use the body in a slightly different way. You do not usually go to the supermarket with a bucket on your head, for example. In performance art, we create images, situations or moments that may refer to everyday life but have another purpose. The purpose of using the body in performance can be different from, say, cooking a meal to satisfy hunger. Of course, there are overlaps. In life, you may encounter situations that resemble a performance moment, but they do not have the same purpose or consciousness of being a performance. That is the difference. Even so, I must underline that there is a lot of dialogue between what you do in performance and what you do in daily life. So, if I were to make a distinction between the two, I would choose the purpose. "What is the purpose of the action?" creates a difference and changes the perception of the body.

LISA: Focusing on another purpose of the body's actions in art, could you give an example of such a situation when dialogue - like the one you mentioned - happens?

JOHANNES: This is a very vivid chatroom in which a lot of exchange is happening. Everything we do can be seen as something artistic - it can be transformed into (performance) art. I can give an artistic purpose to my everyday actions, for example, by changing those routines. I can



twist my habits and change how I do these everyday tasks. For instance, do I brush my teeth just because I must, or do I give it another purpose? For example, you could start singing while moving the brush in your mouth or brush your teeth with someone else and talk about your day while doing it - which is quite funny. By watching someone do the same thing, we drift away from the ordinary, from the routine, from the rules and habits. It is a kind of mirror effect. And yes, this can create a performance moment in the context of everyday life.

In one of our PAS | Online Classes, we asked participants to prepare a toothbrush, toothpaste, a glass of water, and a towel. Before we started, the first thing we did as a group, which did not know each other yet was to collectively brush our teeth. We took this familiar, everyday action, something everyone knows and practices daily, and placed it in a different context. Doing the same action collectively, while listening to the different sounds, created a multi-layered experience that shifted the purpose of the action toward something artistic. Collectively executing this everyday task became something between funny, awkward, and silly. This little shift in context changed the purpose. And here, the purpose was to create a different moment of introduction to the class. You can make these kinds of transformations with all routine-based actions.

LISA: Would you also say that, on an educational level, changing the purpose of actions and the body can open possibilities or shift your perception of the action?

JOHANNES: If someone does not know what performance art is, or has only had a few experiences with it, it is extremely helpful to engage them with actions that are familiar, perhaps even banal. As I said, if you transform the purpose of actions, you can open the gate for a different kind of thinking, seeing, and doing. We shift perspectives. So, yes, it feels right to start with things that we “normally” do, and that we know how to do. Everyday actions are actions, and by giving them another reason, purpose, quality, or context, we naturally enter the field of [performance] art. We open the gate to absurdity, abstraction, composition, and so on.

LISA: I would like to move to my next question, which is about using the body as a form. This is something you really train from the beginning during PAS, based on the idea of an image in the fine arts. You have already mentioned that this is a good starting point to work with what is familiar from everyday life to initiate this process. However, I think using the body as a form is quite complicated, difficult, and quite different from daily life routines. How do we didactically build this process to bring the body closer to form?

JOHANNES: Circle, Square, Triangle, Line, and Dot. The idea of the body as form, or as a formal tool, is a paradox because as much as we try to impose form onto the body, there is this thing called “personality” that does not want to be formalized. Anyway, the combination of body and form generates an artistic attitude that is crucial for understanding yourself as an acting person and the way others perceive the effects of your actions.

The first step could be to become more aware of who I am. Am I tall, short, big, etc.? Do I have long or short hair? This individual research is then compared in a social context with others, without competition, just based on the visible facts. These are form-related questions. We learn the most about ourselves while being with other people. This creates knowledge and understanding of our bodies and identities each time we are in such a context. This understanding of one’s own body - not just as a body, but as a sensation and as a tool - will lead to the realization that “every body can do performance.” You do not need to have a



certain type of body, you do not need to be athletic, you do not need to be good-looking. You can be old, young, or have a special condition. It really does not matter. You, as you are in that moment, are pure potential for art and performance. Our body is a complex thing. The bones we have (or do not have), the blood system, the ability to breathe, move, talk, see, hear, smell, etc., and often all at the same time. That is fantastically crazy.

When we address the body as a form in the PAS | Studies, we play with the same forms used in painting, drawing, etc. I am talking about understanding our body as a square, a triangle, a circle, a line, a dot. So, considering your body as a form is the first step to understanding its possibilities - not only as an individual organism, but as an "object of design," as an "object" or a "figure" that you can use to create art just by standing, sitting, placing yourself, etc. This shift from seeing the body as personal to seeing it as formal might lead to the insight that "I can use my body differently." And here we enter the artistic spheres of understanding the body's capabilities.

Performance Art is made of two words: "performance" and "art," and art is very much about form (such as size, shape, or position). Everything that form contains can be used for individual body research and will lead to the understanding of our potentials and possibilities. Sometimes people may think, "I'm so small, I can't do a performance because no one will see me." But understanding being small as a fact and a potential suddenly turns into the realization that what a small person can do will not work for a tall person - like squeezing into a cardboard box, for example. We understand that my body cannot do this, but it can do that. We look at the possibilities our body offers us and will be incredibly surprised by how many there are.

LISA: So, you see the restrictions of the body as potential?

JOHANNES: Art is free; there should be no restrictions imposed by society, like commercials, stereotypes, intolerance, or anything else that limits us. In art, and especially in performance art, I do not think there's room for restrictions.

LISA: I think it can also be an obstacle for people to realize this paradox you mentioned. It is hard to see your body in a way that differs from everyday life.

JOHANNES: Of course! Nobody said this is easy. That is why we offer the PAS | Studies and provide a safe space to explore this. You do not have to become a performance artist to understand the world, the power, and the quality of performance art. But understanding this art form might give you answers on how to escape stigmatism. Yes, for some people, these processes are difficult, but not impossible.

Sometimes I observe people and think it would be good for them to gain performance experience because they would have more access, more knowledge, and more understanding about their own bodies and capabilities than, for example, through sports. Performance is also a socio-political tool. It makes people aware that they have a real choice in what they want or do not want to be. It gives them the opportunity to decide and to critically reflect on whatever breaks in from the outside world and influences the way they think, live, etc.

LISA: You may have already answered this next question, but when you observe your participants in PAS, what do you think are the typical obstacles in the process of working with the body as form? Are there any?



JOHANNES: Some obstacles I have already mentioned, such as the lack of trust or understanding, or the difficulty of accepting the tool (the body) you have. Let us take something as simple (and wonderful) as how your lungs function. They are yours, you have them, they are your breathing tool, and you know they are not something far away - they are inside your body. It is pure self-knowledge to be aware of how our organs and senses work: your eyes, nose, ears, skin, etc. The first obstacle is that we do not often pay attention to what we have or do not have.

Another barrier is character traits like shyness. We often hear that if you are considered as shy, you cannot perform on stage. This is complete nonsense. I do not know who produced this idea. Using shyness as a strength is exactly what art offers you. Shy people are not stupid; they know they are perceived as shy. Accepting this trait (this form of yours) allows you to say, "I am shy, and I'm using exactly this trait because I understand that it's also my strength."

To overcome the obstacles that one might have because of the programmed mindset that dictates how one should behave - like "I can't do it because..." - creates confidence, stability, trust, and so many other good qualities. What I said about shyness can be applied to all other personality traits, even aggression.

Another difficulty or obstacle I observe in more experienced participants who have already shown several performances is ego. But this obstacle does not only affect experienced participants - it also comes up when you have made your first steps and "tasted the performance milk." It is the ego. How big your ego is defining the way you create. You - or, better said, your ego - push too hard to create THE cool idea, the most unique and brilliant performance. You love your way of doing Performance Art so much that you create specific circumstances, leaving no free space for the pure creation of an artistic work. "I want to be, I have to have, ..." These thoughts hinder the performance art process. But performance art cannot lie, and so it is visible in the performance how big your ego is.

During the PAS process, I see this obstacle and - with permission - I break these kinds of intellectual constructs apart for the sake of greater possibilities, stronger works, and honest art. Success does not come by constructing it.

LISA: I just have an additional thought on this. I'm not sure if this is your intention, but I was thinking about the "From Me To You" task, where you prepare a performance concept for someone else, which in some cases somehow challenges the ego and gives you other ideas or new perspectives on the possibilities of your own body, I guess.

JOHANNES: PAS has developed a wide variety of tasks that challenge the ego. We created them with the purpose of making choices and aiming to open different avenues for research beyond the self. I think letting go of your own ego and donating it to the moment of creation is especially important to empower oneself as a person. Often, insecurity or self-defence is the reason the ego gets in the way. Challenging the ego is meant to build strength and trust in how you perceive others and how you want to be perceived by others. The PAS task "From Me To You" asks you to create a complete performance for a fellow participant. What is often visible is that you create this piece of performance with much more care and passion than you would for yourself. And that is an important realization.



LISA: When we come back to the idea of the body as a form, in an artistic way, with the square, the dots, and the lines, I feel that somehow you achieve this outer perspective of your own body.

JOHANNES: Yes, working formally with your body allows you to achieve this perspective. And being able to shift and switch perspectives is a valuable tool in the art-making process.

LISA: The next topic is about the connection between body and material. In your courses, the material research follows the exercises on the body. As you stated, working with material in performance art is an encounter with another body. Facing this foreign body can create different challenges but also learning opportunities. Could you describe how this interaction usually begins and develops?

JOHANNES: The overture of PAS is the research within the unity of body and space in the context of form. Our bodies are always surrounded by space, and this part of the research is crucial for everything that follows. In different test settings, the body and space are placed into a vivid artistic dialogue in which there is a constant inspirational exchange happening between both elements: How do I feel in this space? How do I feel in this space with others? Does the space feel me? How is the space constructed, shaped? How can my body relate to it? Can I feel the atmosphere? Where is the space I can fit my body? Where can I position myself? Is there space for others? Where are the space limits? Can I find similarities between my body and the space I am in? There is an endless amount of research questions. In a study context, it is - without getting bored - possible to work on this unity for six months or more.

PAS loves to work with materials because they offer an extension to the body and space experiences. Once you have gained a certain understanding of the possibilities of the body and space and then add material to that, it is just fantastic! In the beginning, we celebrate random objects and materials that can be found on the spot before we move on to more carefully selected materials. It could be a small table, a cup, a rope, a ladder, a broom - anything, it really does not matter. We just start to explore these materials and add them to the body and space experiences. It is a very intense and complex research because with these three elements, a lot of overlaps occur. It requires looking in many directions.

If you make an experience with the space, there is you and the space. If you add, say, a bucket to it, you are dealing with more aspects and more possibilities. Sometimes, at the beginning, this also becomes an obstacle to the research or experimentation. What was working before with "only" the body and space might not work so fluidly when you add another element. How we relate to this is exactly as you formulated it in your question: we see the material as a separate and individual body. Of course, the bucket is not a human body, but formally, it is another body.

Having three elements in focus for performance (body, space, and material) allows us to switch and replace them: The body in space can be replaced with a bucket in space. During the PAS | Studies, we emphasize a deep analysis of materials. This is incredibly helpful in the art-making process, as well as for security reasons. Let us stick with the bucket example: From what is the bucket made? What colour is it? How many litres can it hold? Can I see traces of former usage? Or is it brand new? What is its height? How stable is the bucket? Where is it produced? What other information can I find? Having this information allows us to use the bucket consciously and discover its potential for a performance.



That leads to another interesting line of research. Material always has a function. It asks to be used. For a performance process, this is highly interesting because by using material, we already have a specific way of action and movement included, just by using the object or handling the material. And again, if within this process abstraction, transformation, or absurdity is applied, you arrive at the field of (performance) art.

LISA: I thought about the German word for object, "Gegenstand," which already includes the idea of the obstacle. You mentioned during the studies that when dealing with material or an object in a performance context, we face the challenge of slipping into being illustrative or acting. It is like we somehow feel the need to interact with or give life to a dead object - or one which seems dead. How do you perceive this way of interacting with material?

JOHANNES: The key to this problem is transformation and abstraction. It is true that by adding material to the already dense research, the new work can slip into "acting," "being illustrative," or "being theatrical." That is not bad, but it is not what we are aiming for. As a starting point: within artistic research or artmaking, we often use objects and materials not in the sense of how they were originally designed. The painting "This is not a pipe" by René Magritte and the associated question about what reality is, and what is illustration or illusion, becomes important here. For example: "This is not a cup." We know that from a cup, we can drink out of it. That is its original purpose. To drink from it, something needs to be poured inside the cup. If there is nothing inside the cup, I would need to pretend to drink that "nothing" that is not inside the cup.

By using abstraction and/or transformation, I am not looking at the cup as a cup, but rather as a ceramic, round, moulded object. And then I start to experiment - without using its original purpose. I can try putting my hand inside the cup, I can place the cup on my ear, I can try to stand on it, I can try to place the cup in my trouser pocket, I can try to put my toe through the little handle, etc. By doing so, the process will lead us to an abstract or metaphorical meaning of things and present the poetic potential of objects. It will always be a cup, but also, it is not really a cup anymore. And please, let us skip for now the question of meaning and embrace the pure joy of form research within the arts. What we are looking for is a shifted (artistic) view on the object or material we know.

One big obstacle is that we want to be understood by what we present to others. Therefore, we tend to leave the world of abstraction - perhaps because we do not fully trust it yet - and engage in actions that are supported by theatrical expressions and seek verification. The risk of leaving the viewer in an uncanny, undefined area to see what can emerge from there is often seen as nonsense. And that is a normal reaction. But in the arts, we often speak of something that we cannot explain with words, or with sense, or direct meaning. So, what happens when we let go of meaning? What else will appear? Do we create art so that people understand what we are doing? Or do we use art to provide something that we feel, see, and about which we may have no concrete knowledge, but we're trying to get as close as possible?

LISA: I have two additional thoughts, and questions. What I took from your answer are two main aspects. Firstly, the importance of having a real research question to avoid jumping to illustrations, and the uncertainty of what you are dealing with. You can try to get as close as you can, but not as if you already know everything. Otherwise, you have a clear, direct path, and it is quite easy to fall into a trap where you really want to be understood by the audience because your path seems so clear. So, maybe that research part is also important for

performance in general. The second point I took from your answer is a certain confidence in the audience. They take what they take and do with it what they will, and you “just” pass it on.

JOHANNES: The audience is not stupid, that is for sure. People have lives, they celebrate birthdays, have children, go to funerals, shop, visit the doctor, and have opinions... It is not like the artist is the genius who needs to tell people how life works. I trust the audience when I present my performances - that they can discover something of value for them while witnessing my artistic offering. If you think you know everything and they do not, that is an arrogant attitude towards your audience. Trusting that something meaningful will emerge from the actions made, and that what the audience sees is a brilliant moment in performance art practice.

LISA: I think you have already covered the next question, but I would just like to give space to it in case you have any additional thoughts. One of your famous expressions is, “material can be a trap.” What do you mean by that?

JOHANNES: Material can be a trap in terms of its functionality, handling, choice, or metaphorical meaning. Strings, matches, lighters, buttons, electronic devices, a simple glass of water - many things have the potential to trap the flow of a performance. We know that anything lying on the floor cannot fall. I have often seen during performances that a glass of water was sitting on a table, and then it fell and broke. This was obviously not the performer’s intention. Of course, this situation opens another reality, the question of what to do with this new reality (which is also interesting), but the original idea can no longer be executed because of this “accident.” You are trapped by managing the material. Another almost classic example in performance art is dealing with technology - like a simple mp3 player that should play a sound or song at a specific moment, or a video projector. Sometimes even machines like drills, or something as simple as a light switch. In the moment of performance, these technical elements suddenly do not do what you want. The mp3 player cuts off and you must search for the song again, the video projector goes into sleep mode and needs time to boot up, cables are not properly connected, and a lot of time is spent trying to find the “mistake,” etc. In the flow of an action, these disturbances can take away the magic of the performance. You are trapped by the functionality.

Knowing your co-performers, as I like to call the materials in a performance, can help you be aware of these traps. In PAS we invest a lot of time in material research. The right material can elevate your performance or destroy it - and everything in between. Since materials have their own lives, the aspect of being a trap is just one way of looking at the material world. In another situation, the “misbehaviour” of an object or material can create the exact opposite sensation. Nevertheless, for educational purposes, it is important to be aware of material traps - not only for safety reasons, but simply because it will not work to hang a bucket of water with a wool string.

LISA: It is just a repetition of your words, but the paradox you were talking about earlier - being a person and an artistic figure - sometimes stops us in our daily lives from taking action. I have these obstacles, usually driven by emotions and feelings in the moment. In the context of performance, you mention your inner themes in some way. Sometimes you make them a theme, but not always - it can happen, though. By accepting that in a performance you become that neutral figure you mentioned earlier, you are not really yourself in that given situation. For example, you are not Johannes who starts to cry and explode with emotion. You do not channel those emotions, but bring them through art to another level, I would say. I am

interested in the educational potential - what you can learn from that. It is an uncomfortable situation to deal with individual experiences and emotions. On one hand, you hold yourself back from reactions you might give in your normal surroundings, and on the other hand, you are putting yourself in a very vulnerable position in front of an audience. Of course, you choose what and how intensely you show this private part of you, and how transparent you want to be in the performance. So, I wonder: why do people put themselves in these situations? What do they learn from it?

JOHANNES: I agree that presenting an honest piece of performance art in front of an audience can be very scary for someone who has not done (many) performances before. Even for artists who have been working with performance art for years, the moment of performance is still filled with excitement, nervousness, and for some, it is still a bit scary. But also, in this moment unfolds an essential part of performance art's nature - something that is not easy to explain with words but is felt in your whole body when you experience it. It is something bigger than the doubts, hesitations, or fears you might have.

In art, not only in performance art, but the urgency to create is driven by personal life stories, experiences, and observations. The source of creation is often something known to the artist, because something - whether good, bad, or everything in between - has been experienced. It is because you have some sort of knowledge about that personal experience, and you can, want, or must do something about it. Some choose to ignore it, while others create art. For example, if I were to give a talk about how it feels to fly an airplane, I could not. I would have to read about it, watch YouTube videos, and in the best case, talk to a pilot, because I have never been in the cockpit of such a huge machine. That experience I do not have, so I can only speculate or fantasize about it. I would feel more certain talking about the feeling of flying in an airplane as a passenger, since I have done that. That is an experience I have.

To first read the biographies of artists and then looking at their work is a wonderful thing to do. You might be astonished by how closely their art relates to their life experiences. During the artistic process, the personal transforms into a public matter - a shared space of showing and looking. In this shared space, art happens, and the paintings, photographs, sculptures, and performances are "only" triggers.

Creating art that relates to something personal is a good starting point because you know what you are talking about. You do not have to come up with something. You can be more certain during the process of creating. Of course, if what you create stays solely in your personal field, it can turn into a selfish act - something that is important only to you, but not to others. The personal should transform into something that offers overlaps, intersections, and accessibility for others to relate to. Most personal topics can be shared because others might have had similar life experiences. Topics like loss, belonging, trauma, depression, anger, identity, and societal issues, etc., are part of our lives and are shared among humans. Each of us has different experiences with the same things, but the way we see it, feel it, and cope with it is interesting for others to witness. They might understand their own feelings about the same topic better or find solutions in the way you see it, the way you have transformed it. This dialogue is valuable and reason enough to create and share art.

What we can learn from performance art processes and from sharing something precious through art is immense. Through artistic processes, we learn more about ourselves and others. We come to understand the world we live in better, and we learn to relate differently to others and the various challenges in our lives. We gain strength, sureness, stability, social

competence, and the ability to look at problems differently. There are so many valuable lessons we can discover through art. I wholeheartedly suggest everyone try performance art, not for the sake of becoming a performance artist, but to appreciate the enriching experiences it offers.

LISA: It is a good point to come to the process. This is really connected to what you just said and to the transformative power of your actions in everyday life and in performance art.

JOHANNES: It gives you the good feeling that you can actively take part in society in exactly the way you are, through what you do.

LISA: There is one more question regarding using what is personal as a source. During PAS I Studies in Nijmegen, in the task "Word and Action," participants needed to come up with a word that is personally connected to them and create a short action based on it. The word they chose could be something that fits well with the person, or even something that triggers them negatively, or connects to something they dislike. Is it also part of your didactic approach in PAS to develop works from individual experiences?

JOHANNES: As I said: One is more certain in creating something from what you know, what you have experienced or gone through in life. The PAS task "Word and Action" is a fitting example because it lets you combine form with personal findings and share them through a simple action. This simple task also helps to show how you can create a short piece of action art using abstraction, reduction, and transformation. The origin of the word does not need to be revealed; it is only important to the person creating the action. It is a starting point, a generator. By watching all the short presentations, we can see how it is possible to transform something personal into something public. I really enjoy this task.

LISA: Ok, then I see three building steps: the form, the personal, and the public dialogue, all focused through transformation.

JOHANNES: These steps make perfect sense in performance art education.

LISA: You have already mentioned the fluidity of everyday life - the fact that you never know what is going to happen next. This also plays a key role in performance art, because usually, you do not rehearse what you are going to do, which is a major difference from theatre. You let yourself be placed in these unexpected situations. I think during PAS in Nijmegen, the participants had the chance to train this a lot. For example, in the task 'ABBA,' right before starting their performance, they were given the task to reverse the course of action, meaning the end of their performance became, very suddenly, the beginning. Can you give some didactical thoughts on this? What was the aim behind it? Why did you put them in such an uncomfortable situation?

JOHANNES: "ABBA" is more of an experiment, a test than a task, and it is very flexible to place within a running process. In PAS, we use "ABBA" when we feel the participants are becoming too comfortable with their creations. The main idea is to provoke a moment of confusion - an unexpected situation you are confronted with, and you must deal with it, right before your presentation. It is an experiment that prepares you for the unforeseeable moments in performance. We gave them a performance task to work out a short action related to space, body, and material. When everyone was ready to present their results, we sent them to you before their presentation, and you presented them with this note saying they

had to reverse their action. The moment you understand that you cannot just perform your piece as planned causes confusion, frustration, even anger. It is a true challenge. Your mind is everywhere at once, and you are trying to find solutions. You must make quick decisions because you only have 20 seconds to adapt before you start. You must let go of your previous idea and enter the area of pure creation right in the moment. There is no chance to hide behind a clever idea or a good image; it is an authentic and vulnerable moment.

What we saw was amazing! The participants embraced the failure, found wonderful and funny solutions, and were fully engaged. "ABBA" prepares you for all the unpredictable situations that can and will happen during a performance.

The PAS concept of "Don't rehearse" is as old as PAS itself. In our courses, we celebrate the pure performance moments. You research, produce ideas, find your materials, make drawings and notes, test your materials, think things through, and then perform. Rehearsal is essential in theatre processes, but in performance, it is not needed; in fact, it can be a distraction.

LISA: So, we can understand this part of letting go, when you embrace the unexpected - or somehow, just deal with the unexpected in the moment - has an impact on the quality of your performance. This is also what you are saying, right? The quality of the performance and the relationship with the audience changes. But what about the personal learning process? What do you think is triggered in this process?

JOHANNES: There are many personal learning processes happening while being involved in performance as an art practice. Let us take, for example, making a "mistake." Inventions, like the X-ray or penicillin, were possible because a "mistake" was made. In an artistic process, the "mistake" can offer a new way, a different direction that, without the mistake, might never have been discovered.

In PAS, we spend a lot of time on experimentation. Before we start an experiment, we have no idea what will come out in the end. Perhaps nothing, but perhaps an invention.

We all know the feeling of making a "mistake," something embarrassing, uncomfortable - especially when this "mistake" happens in front of others. Accepting the mistake - perhaps not even commenting on it - is embracing the newly established reality. This is important for the performance art process, but it is also immensely helpful to understand for our everyday lives. We do not want to make mistakes; we are afraid of doing things wrong because we do not want to be "punished," judged, or reprovved. But we also know that humans make mistakes - all the time. Since everyone makes mistakes, the centre of attention shifts to how we solve the consequences of those mistakes. During a performance presentation, this can become a highlight.

In PAS, we really stick to this: Within the artistic process, "There is no right and no wrong." This comes with a truth in performance art: unless we have done it, we do not know. We speculate, but we know when we have brought it to reality. Once there is a reality, we can talk about it, analyse it, debate it, and shape a better understanding of what has happened.

It is a pity that what is possible and needed in art is "not allowed" in everyday life. We can all learn from the arts to rethink how we deal with mistakes.

LISA: The typical PAS view on the process is - what you have mentioned - that there is no right or wrong. However, we also talked about the role of reflection, which sharpens the form of your performance. So, in fact, there can be differences in the quality of performance. Don't you think this can lead to misunderstandings? Or in other words: What do we mean by quality in performance? What is the point of opening a space without mistakes, and then during reflection, placing this normative thought?



JOHANNES: That would be very mean! First, you say that there is no right and no wrong, and then you would state that there is a right and a wrong. That would indeed lead to misunderstandings and confusion. It also would be very directive. PAS has a quote that is especially important for our work: "There is not one way of doing performance, but many." This means that we are not interested in pressing our views on the participants, but rather in enhancing their own views.

Reflection in PAS is always a collective matter. After a presentation, everyone who engages in the PAS process is invited to reflect on what was presented. The person who presented the performance will hear many opinions and can choose what is important for their process and what is not. By collectively sharing feelings, opinions, and views, we generate a pool of questions without answering them. The aim of these reflection rounds is to focus on what might come next - on the progress, development, and evolution of artistic thoughts, concepts, and research. During the collective process of reflection, it is important to remind ourselves that we are not on Facebook giving feedback. We do not comment or try to be critically reflective for the sake of likes or followers, but rather engage in honest reflections that move the artistic process forward through inspiration.

Someone new to performance art will create a quality performance with the knowledge and ability they have at that moment. And a professional does the exact same thing. There is no difference between the two, only a different amount of experience. But with less or more experience, everyone can create a relevant piece of art in that moment.

People might think, "Johannes has made so many performances, he knows what a good performance is and what isn't." Even though I have made and seen a lot of performances, which does not mean I have the answer to everything. A younger person, for example, has a different view on the world than I do, and by exchanging these different viewpoints, we might be able to shape a new space of knowledge that points beyond the here and now, into what might be created tomorrow.

LISA: I like the idea of the direction of reflection that moves forward, not only looking back and focusing on what you cannot change anymore.

JOHANNES: This reflection approach connects to performance art based on its ephemerality. It always points to what comes next, like developing art in time, and then it disappears. Reflection cannot only be about applause. The artistic process would dry out. The feedback and reflection should always point to what comes next. Doing so generates an ongoing process from one performance to the next, and so on. Doing - Reflecting - Learning - Doing - Reflecting - Learning - Doing...

LISA: We directly jumped into the last block of questions, which is about reflection. That is very visible in PAS because there is "THE WALL." You also include the "Paper Time" to create input for "THE WALL." These time slots are also spaces for reflection; participants can make drawings and notes about their own experiences and the experiences of others. I have two questions about that: What can we learn from "Paper Time" in the moment of creating, and what can we learn from "THE WALL" in retrospect?

JOHANNES: By being aware of what you are doing, you gain responsibility. By reflecting on your actions, you become accountable for your actions. Actions can make you a hero or bring you to prison. Reflecting on artistic performance processes sharpens your awareness of your actions, but also the impact they have on others.



I have this example about touching a hot iron: “Don’t touch the iron,” we all might know this sentence as a child that someone once said to us. We think, “What the heck, why?” and are not aware of the danger; we do not see the heat. Then, out of curiosity, you touch it... And at that very moment, you immediately know and realize. After you have learned about the function of the iron, you will become very aware of touching one again. In relation to an exercise or presentation within the PAS performance process, experiencing and reflecting are bound together and create knowledge.

Throughout the whole PAS process, there are always paper and pens available, and we ask the participants to write or sketch down whatever they think is important to reflect on. This could be a word, a sentence, a quote that someone said, or a drawing of a performance moment. These papers are then hung on “THE WALL” for everyone to see. The number of papers will grow each day, like a plant, like an organism, and become a direct documentation of the artistic process. The papers on “THE WALL” create overlaps of opinions, reflections, and you can see and read what others have contributed. This is a brilliant educational tool because it “teaches” on its own. Already after one day of working, “THE WALL” shows its beauty and relevance. After the whole PAS process, you can see how we arrived at the public performances and witness the immense work that has been done. Because performance art is an ephemeral art form, seeing this analogue documentation is a mind-blowing experience.

LISA: And in retrospect, because you also create a publication from “THE WALL.” How can one use these papers for their progress?

JOHANNES: Flipping through the online publications in which we include the entire wall, and the photographs made during the process by Monika Deimling is a good reminder of how we evolve within an artistic process. It is not only a documentation; it is a working book for further research. We know that someone who was not part of the studies can also use the publication for research, follow the experiences made, and find inspiration. What we do in the Studies is not over after we say goodbye - it continues and resonates for a longer time. The publication offers a chance to revisit the experiences, much like flipping through your own notebook or sketchbook.



Scan the QR code to see the online process publication “Responsive Listening” of PAS #80 | “Course of action”, 568 pages, published in 2023.

LISA: My sum-up question: What do you think is the major reason I should do performance in my life?

JOHANNES: As I said, you do not have to become a performance artist to gain and use performance experience. Besides all the wonderful artistic discoveries, I think for everyone, these experiences are beneficial because they allow you to understand more. More of yourself, of others, of society, of politics, of the world, of our times... Performance art experiences will change the way you look at and perceive things, and they will help you bring all this into dialogue with others, offering a distinct perspective. After 15 years of running PAS



and more than 25 years of teaching performance art, I know that for some people, performance art processes can be life changing. Within the artistic social setting performance art provides, it gives you tools to actively participate in society. It strengthens your sense of being, it allows you to look beyond the horizon, and it empowers you to act and to change. There is a lot - really a lot - that people can learn from performance art processes. I think performance art should be a regular subject in schools, like twice a week, with classes on the practical experiences of performance. Because it is not just an artistic tool, it is also a tool for social (inter)action. It teaches all of us about togetherness, which is the solution to the challenges of our times.

The conversation between Lisa Epp and BBB Johannes Deimling took place following the 80th edition of PAS | Performance Art Studies, titled "Course of Action," held in collaboration with POPOP ART Nijmegen, Netherlands, in 2022. The interview formed part of Lisa Epp's state examination thesis at the University of Leipzig, under the supervision of Dr. Ines Seumel, exploring the research topic "Aspects of Resistance in Art Education-Mediated Performance Practice."