INTRODUCTION

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Abstract

This special issue is interested in the processes of creating performing arts settings, including spaces for dance, arts festivals, and theatre performances, during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors explore the continuities and changes in the configurations of performing arts settings and ask about their transformative potential. The cultural initiatives in focus are located at the fringes of geo-political complexities: They take place in Cyprus's Buffer Zone, around a palace in post-Prussian North Poland, within Russia's Irish dance community, in Latvia's theatrical community. This issue further ethnographically records and interrogates challenges and odds in making performing art settings during and beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic. It finds that different experiences of "losing touch" and detachment become inseparably linked with practices of entanglement, shaping the possibility of "taking place" in performing arts settings. Methodologically, the authors in this issue bridge the commonly upheld gap between research and practice in the fields they discuss, transgressing the boundaries between ethnography, socio-cultural analysis, and engaged research.

Leaving the Capsule

(..)

Now it's time to leave the capsule if you dare
This is Major Tom to Ground Control
I'm stepping through the door (..)

For here
Am I sitting in a tin can
Far above the world
Planet Earth is blue
And there's nothing I can do

Ground Control to Major Tom
Your circuit's dead, there's something wrong
Can you hear me, Major Tom?
(..)

From "Space Oddity", David Bowie 1969

In David Bowie's "Space Oddity", protagonist Major Tom stages the ancient drama of detachment and isolation from the rest of humanity making it relevant for his contemporaries in the novel form of what Houghton [2022: 433] has called "cosmic solitude"[1]. While remotely guided by the questionable directives of a ground control station, Major Tom remains totally on his own, circulating the earth solitarily in a tin-can-like rocket. As doing so, he is then expected to open the doors and step into a new reality, the risks of which no one can fully calculate. Will he get hurt? Will he return home? Where and what is home? Suddenly, a creeping sense of losing touch with everything familiar hits him and a voice suggests that the connection is breaking up, "Can you hear me, Major Tom, can you hear me?", the voice starts crackling. Major Tom, locked up in the movement of the tin capsule looks out onto the earth and doesn't seem to have an answer what to do next.

Major Tom in his rocket has always functioned as a metaphor of shifting meanings, a myth-in-the-making: By creating the image of Major Tom, David Bowie and his production team managed to give shape to a blurry feeling of detachment and nostalgia bringing together over millions of listeners, who could identify with losing touch and perhaps, in a next step, with a deep longing to reconnect and heal from alienation and estrangement. This special issue of "Culture Crossroads" is about exactly this: the sense of detachment from each other and the longing to reconnect,

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[1] *Soledad cósmica.*

and its complicated materialisation through the making of spaces for artistic and cultural encounter.

The special issue was born out of a conference panel at EASA 2022 in Belfast entitled "Creating Performing Arts Settings Against the Odds", in which the contributors started to reflect on the complexity of odds (and oddities) in the sphere of producing spaces and places in the loosely defined cultural and artistic domain. The debate had been ignited by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which artists, producers and audiences were confronted to deal with alien conditions for cultural productions that followed health concerns and severely limiting legislations towards their activities that aimed at reducing the spread of the virus. One aspect particularly worthwhile discussing further with respect to the performing arts, were emerging experiences and popularising definitions of space, place and event. During the COVID-19 pandemic, radically rethinking and re-making space and place in everyday practice became a central and shared social concern, and for many even an existential challenge, notably for individuals in the performing arts: it included navigating social life between lockdown, cancellations, the "hybrid" and the "remote", new (old) borders, and constantly shifting spatial governance, while often facing existential economic hardship and the fear of health risks. Following Emil Durkheim's [1938, 1895] and Marcel Mauss's [2002, 1925] concepts of the "total social fact", many social scientists have proposed to read the global pandemic as such, a phenomenon that affects everyone, is external to the actor and (im)mobilizes entire societies [Vandenberghe and Véran 2021: 174; see also Demertzis and Eyerman 2020, Ghahramani et al. 2021, Santos et al. 2020]. As COVID-19 became a normative condition overnight across the globe, impacting the arts community and cultural live events at an unknown scale [Woodward and Haynes 2023: 2; cf. Völkl, Obermayr & Hobisch 2023; Bruzzi 2022], it seemed crucial to start a nuanced conversation about processes of making performing arts settings during and since this time that was based on ethnographic insights. In this issue the authors advance this conversation by finding situated answers to how the geo-political and socio-economic conditions of COVID-19 interacted with other site- and event-specific challenges; how meaningful the Pandemic was for shaping the intersections of pre-existing challenges; how spatial, social, and aesthetic configurations of performing arts events developed over longer periods of times, and what influenced this development.

Transformative Events and their Institutional Entanglements

Among the performing arts settings discussed in this issue are two festivals, a street parade, an experimental theatre performance, a transnational dance network, and a research collaboration. While each of them tells a different story of "taking

place" and "losing touch", they share the promise of being transformative events – in one way or another – to their participants, co-creators and the broader contexts in which they find themselves.

Furthering Erving Goffman's [1959] writings, the work of performance theorists Victor Turner and Richard Schechner [1985a; 1985b] on performativity and the liminal has suggested that theatre and other, for instance, traditional sacred performance settings, can be understood as extraordinary spaces, in which individuals co-fabricate existential changes. These changes affect who individuals identify as and how they relate to their respective community; they can happen instantaneously (linear transition) or gradually (through repeated cycles of transportation) [Turner and Schechner 1985b: 131], in very different performative traditions. *"Theatre and ordinary life are a möbius strip, each turning into the other."*, the authors write [1985a: 14], emphasising the embedded role of theatre in shaping social experience. In recent years, these arguments have been deepened through an increasing interest in performing arts settings as transformative social spaces that bear the possibility of future-making and re-worlding [Tinius and Flynn 2015; Salzbrunn and Moretti 2020; Kazubowski-Houston, M. and M. Auslander 2021, Rai et al. 2021]. In this vein, recent publications on the subject have reasserted the Brechtian understanding of performance spaces as politically transformative place-takings suggesting

> *"political and ideological battles often play out through artistic performances and cultural forms, while political sites and actors take on theatrical dimensions and strategies"* [Rai et al. 2021:6].

Anthropologists further started to ask questions about the relationship between the conditions under which certain art settings and cultural events are produced and the creative outcomes and socio-cultural possibilities that emerge from these performing art settings [cf. Picard 2016; Oleksiak 2019; Pistrick 2020]. In her doctoral thesis, Julie Oleksiak asserts that

> *"the creation of musical performances and works cannot be thought, researched, analysed independently without taking account of the institutions that allow them to exist and the agents who make this institution exist as they are using it as a resource of action"* [Olesiak, 2020: Resume].

She further emphasizes the political positionality of the programme director or artistic producer as standing at the crossroads of strategy and creativity. This perspective makes an important part of the articles in this special issue: in their field sites, the authors set out to discuss the processes of making performing art settings, often focusing on producing roles and the power relations in these processes. In that

vein, Nihal Soganci and Ellada Evangelou investigate the political backdrop of the buffer zone in Nicosia, Cyprus, and its effect on the nature of Buffer Fringe Festival; Hannah Wadle discusses the longue durée history of funding politics in the German-Polish cultural realm and the making of an interdisciplinary community festival in former East Prussia; Alexandra Glaskovskaya examines the effects of politicization within an internationally operating Irish dance network on the dancers; and Muktupāvela and Laķe debate changing concepts of theatrical "presence" within the institutional context of Latvia before, during and after the pandemic.

To sum up the questions that emerge from these preceding considerations for this issue: firstly, what emerges is an inquiry into the transformative horizons of the discussed settings and into the political agency that might be experienced through them, secondly, it is the question how these horizons have been affected and altered through changes within institutional frameworks of taking place, and thirdly, there is a question about the individuals and groups involved in making and negotiating performing arts settings and about their multiple motivations to do so.

Taking Place

Performing arts settings often face precarious financial, legal, political and weather-bound conditions. Furthermore, they have to be accommodating to different audiences and accompany the creative processes of artists with their often highly unusual approaches to the spatial. In her work about creative processes in organising a parade event in Manchester (UK), Jessica Symons describes the inherent uncertainty and, in tandem with it, organisational resilience of what she calls "shaping the flow" of the community-based art production.

> "*They know that the parade will happen, that all the elements within it will take a very particular shape on the day and also that they cannot be sure exactly what that shape might be. (..) A preparedness to adapt runs throughout every aspect of the parade development and it seems that the parade is only possible because of the organisers' capacity to respond productively to obstacles*" [Symons 2016: 702].

Symons's work shows the event and performing arts setting as a process of continuous attending to difficult circumstances in order to facilitate the performing arts event and create the conditions for its "taking place". A recent study of queer and feminist art spaces in North America by Erin Silver [2023] adds a longer-term perspective to researching "taking place" in the arts: it unpacks how spatial characteristics have interacted with understandings of activist, gendered cultural production from the late 1960s to the present, and how individuals are engaging with art spaces on the backdrop of those histories. Observations like Symons's

[2016] and Silver's [2023], strongly suggest that creating performing arts settings involves complex, novel spatiotemporal practices and discursive processes, to which ethnographies can add valuable observations. With this suggestion in mind, this special issue suggests that looking at the re-configurations of some of these settings in a broader context of the COVID-19 health crisis and beyond it, can bring thought-provoking insights into contemporary reconfigurations of place-making and place-taking. The proposition is hence to look more closely at the making of performance art settings and at the complexities of inventing places on the backdrop of what could be hypothetically viewed as a global paradigm shift in how we make and experience space [cf. Komninou 2022; Abd Elrahman 2021].

Starting the enquiry from the COVID-19 health crisis and its spatial epistemologies and continuing it with questions about the conditions for creating performing art settings, this special issue calls for a new curiosity in the politics and practice of "taking place" and of "losing touch". The field of tension between these two processes and their intersections casts light on diverse engagements with the spatial without discriminating between their permanence and without imposing definitions of place or event that assert a fixed perspective on the creation of the social. "Taking place" here has the connotation of something that happens, occurs, that is sited and contextualized through its situatedness. It is closely related to the concept of event, in which Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison see much potential for exploring futurity, permanence and ideas of the possible:

> "*The question of the event opens up a further set of issues about how to create and sustain events; how to bear and extend the potential that events open up, the sense of promise and futurity that they may hold?*" [Anderson and Harrison 2010: 23]

With "taking place" this issue addresses events or event-places[1] as a process with uncertain course and outcomes. It starts from the Lefebvrian [Lefebvre (1974) 1991] proposition that space and the spatial (including place) are actively made and constantly (re-) produced in social processes – engaging the struggles and power relations that are present in society. The capacity of the concept of "taking place" to illuminate creative spatial processes has also been taken up with respect to art spaces: "Taking Place reveals the space of art as a temporary work in progress", writes

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[1] Following historian Philip Ethington [2007: 483] and philosopher Edward Casey [2007: 510], who agree on the congruence of place and event, adding the different emphasis that lies on each notion, with the former foregrounding the spatial, and the latter the temporal. In their otherwise heated debate about the boundary, place and event for placing and mapping the past, they agree with each other that "all events are places and vice versa".

curator of the exhibition Beatrix Ruf[1] in the opening remark to "*Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset: Taking Place*" at Kunsthalle Zürich in 2001–2002. The artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset's work has titillated been installations and performative works, offering critical commentaries about social constructions of space and, more recently, the human body. "Taking place" hence further alludes to the active social struggles and political processes during which places are taken – places taken for the use of performing arts settings, for encounters through art, for communities of practitioners, or also places taken away from the possibility of staging performing arts and creating encounters.

The title of the special issue thus highlights the political, institutional, and moral struggles that are inherent to the making of performing art settings, which, more often than not, happen in complex spatial configurations with the trajectory to address, if not even to subvert or transform, these configurations through the different spatialities they propose as part of their individual agendas of "taking place". "Taking place" is thus a form of entanglement and of getting involved. Or as historian Philip Ethington notes:

> "*All action, whether building pyramids, making love, writing, or reading, takes and makes place; all individuals are the creative authors of their own presence*" [Ethington 2007: 484].

Following Ethington's definition, actions of taking and making place give a clue about the multiple ways in which humans become co-authors of historical processes through their entanglements. It is a concept that recognizes and emphasizes the individual agency and creativity in shaping one's everyday presence. Its shortcomings in addressing the inequalities and struggles that reside in each process of taking place may be supplemented with the leitmotiv in the existential anthropology of Michael Jackson, which describes the dilemma of the human condition as a constant jockeying between acting and being acted upon. Art and ritual, he argues, are not only social phenomena, but what he calls ontologically "primitive" modes of action that affect emotions, body and consciousness:

> "*One effect of such action is to transform subject-object relations, such that a person comes to experience herself as an actor and not just acted upon – as a "who" and not merely a "what"* [Jackson 2016: 155].

What is yet missing in the previously quoted works is a recognition of more-than-human agency and the participation of more-than-human actors in processes

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[1] Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset: Taking Place, exhibition of Kunsthalle Zurich, 10.11.2001–20.01.2002. Available: https://www.kunsthallezurich.ch/en/ausstellungen/963-elmgreen-dragset (viewed 01.11.2023.)

of making and taking place. And it is precisely the eventful presence of such more-than-human micro agents that was crucial to other processes of taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dixon and Jones [2015: 227; 230] propose the notion of *tactile topology* to account for the creation, occupying and traversing of more-than human spaces through touch and to address the porosity of the body to non-human micro-organisms. In the face of viral presence and it taking place,

> "[i]t is through touch that the body becomes vulnerable to the potentially patho-logical and not-so-distant other – putting us at constant risk of being penetrated, invaded and over-run by the micro's ever-proliferating inhabitants,"

Dixon and Jones [2015: 230] write in their prophetic discussion of the movie *Contagion*. Seen from the human stance, touching becomes a potentially, threatening event that could initiate an unwanted process of "taking place" in the body. The suddenly appearing eventful nature of viral tactility during the COVID-19 Pandemic must hence be part of an emerging, contextual understanding of "taking place" for the purpose of this issue.

What we embrace for this collection of articles as we ethnographically explore processes of "taking place" are hence four aspects of the concept: the inherent, ongoing struggles over place and events; the human and non-human agency and their tactile topologies; the making of individual and shared "presence(s)" through creative and proactive entanglements; and the potential of performing art settings to radically affect and re-balance the perception of subjectivity in groups and individuals.

Losing Touch

In the viral scenario of COVID-19 and its emerging tactile topologies, "losing touch", became one of the central premises for re-inventing social relationships and their spatial dimensions in new, initially temporary forms during COVID-19. The condition of physical distancing and isolation that served as tool for addressing the transmission of COVID-19 was based on efforts of detaching the social from the physical, of deconstructing this relationship. These efforts were followed by reassembling the relationship between the physical and the social afresh, including new tools of regulation and governance.

At the same time, different groups of individuals had very diverse experiences of detachment: While for gig-workers in the platform economy, losing touch translated into a work of non-encounters and boredom that was void of previous conviviality [Straughan & Bissell 2022], for university students temporary detachment brought the chance to take a step back from Campus sexual culture, reflect on one's sexuality, set conscious boundaries and revisit questions of consent [Blum et al. 2023].

Performing art settings were among the most visible fields in which those tactile topologies were being reconfigured – re-negotiated, resisted, re-created – at the intersections of health risks, political decisions, artistic agendas, economic necessities, social conventions. And here, again, losing touch and feelings of detachment had their own meanings. While aesthetic and social spaces that performing art settings create have the potential of enabling participants to lose touch with the familiar in favour of alternative propositions and new experiences, they also tend to rely on physical forms of co-presence. So, while detachment itself cannot be called alien to performing arts settings, the ways in which changing *tactile topographies* challenged known relationships between losing touch and taking place will be of concern in this issue.

In their (pre-pandemic) anthropological exploration of the concept of detachment, Candea et al. [2017: 1] have emphasised that detachment bears social, political, and ethical relevance in many contexts and stands in complex and multiple relationships with relationality and engagement. The presented articles further these trains of thought, as they demonstrate through ethnographic evidence how "losing touch" in its different shapes gives processes of "taking place" new directions and, sometimes, demands new definitions of them. Candea et al. [2017: 23] argue further that detachment can both appear as a (moral) ideology and as a practice (accessible to ethnographic research). The articles of this issue mostly address moral ideologies and practices of detachment at their intersection with the political and the artistic and in conversation with international, state agendas or local governance.

Starting from this point of departure, "losing touch" and the subsequent sense of detachment in the following articles have more than one flooring; they appear as the liminal quality of art-spaces to imagine otherwise and beyond the post-imperial canon (Soganci and Evangelou; Wadle), they enter the stage in response to emotional and ethical desperation to untie the self from an enforced, unwanted national identity (Glaskovskaya), they come up in the desire to question cultural traditions and artistic conventions (Leizoala; Muktupāvela and Laķe); and they conceive themselves as creative challenges to move from self-centred artwork to artwork that engages social imaginaries.

The authors of this issue are interested in gaining empirical, ethnographic insights into these moments and sites, in which such re-definitions occur. The question that moves them is thus concerned with what happens, when processes of "taking place" and "losing touch" concur and interact with one another, what definitions of "taking place" and "losing touch" are at work in their given field sites, and how they change over time.

Another term that comes to help in locating the contributions of this issue, is the notion of "fringes". Redefining "fringes" for the purpose of this issue allows us

to make sense of the complex situatedness of the performative art settings – geo-politically, historically, artistically, and in relation to other events.

Europe's Fringes beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic

While the COVID-19 pandemic is a starting point for our reflection in this special issue and while this issue proposes to think of it as a significant, global paradigm shift for social experiences of the spatial as mentioned earlier, it is yet important to understand that the narratives of the articles in this journal span well beyond the pandemic. And although the COVID-19 pandemic appears in all the works, it is not necessarily the single challenge or most central one in the process of place-making that the authors describe in their papers.

In the geo-political context of the articles in this issue, all authors describe experiences of substantial vulnerability, precariousness, struggle and acquired resilience as a given for their events well before and still after the global health crisis. In fact, the spatial tensions and frictions at the crevices of which the described performing arts settings discussed in this issue take place are multi-layered and reach into conflict-ridden pasts, geo-politically unstable presents, and struggled-over futures. They take us to histories of war and colonialization which speak about violence, loss of home, separation, trauma, and guilt at what we loosely term Europe's fringes. The notion of fringes carves out a new shade in the anthropological colour palette theorizing peripheralities. Concepts that address experiences of peripherality and remoteness are manifold in anthropology, a discipline, to which the marginal has always been at the centre of concern. In their pre-pandemic compilation of articles, Saxer and Andersson prophetically drew attention to "the return of remoteness" in a new shape and set sails to

> "*explore the current re-emergence and mobilization around remoteness as a structuring device, as political idiom, as resource and as a form of practice at a time of intense yet imperiled 'globalisation'*" [Saxer and Andersson 2019:2].

Saxer and Andersson see themselves among others in continuity with Edwin Ardener's work [2012], which describes remoteness as a long-distance relationship marked by inequality and the vulnerability of one group to the continuous, often failing "innovations" of the other. At the heart of their anthropological inquiry stands the intersection between remoteness and power in the context of changing world "disorders": the active production of remoteness, among others through the disorganization of economic and infrastructural connectivities. These (world) politics of remoteness, of rendering remote bear significance also for the character of performing arts settings in the articles of this special issue: they set the frameworks for creative interventions and their life-courses. Questions of transnational power

relations are implicit to each of the discussions of the making of performing art settings, and transcend the transnational event of the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, there is more to performing art settings and those who make them than the forces that they are exposed to. We see these settings themselves as forces of connection and disconnection and are particularly interested in the agency that these settings/events and the individuals or groups engaged in their production (in what international relations jargon likes to describe as parts of "soft power") can claim for themselves.

Fringes as a proposition for further anthropologically exploring aspects of peripherality puts the focus on the realm of cultural productions and performative arts and their specific experiences of remoteness, which since the global pandemic through the paradigm of the "remote" gained new, additional layers of meaning. Therefore, the term "fringes" not only alludes to a geo-political sense of remoteness of the locations, in which the papers are situated, but also refers to the concept of a cultural event that happens non-juried in a semi-official realm, at the fringe of a bigger, more official and more institutionalized event. This particular fringe-ness hence includes artistic and entrepreneurial innovations at the semi-policed or non-guarded outskirts of a main event.

This definition is based on the circumstances that gave Edinburgh Fringe Festival its name, when it emerged in 1947 as unofficial event alongside the tightly curated, invitation-only Edinburgh International Festival:

> "*In that first year eight theatre troupes who had not been invited to perform arrived on the scene, arranged a performance space, and put on their shows during the run of the official festival. Their efforts were fruitful, and the following year even more unofficial participants were present. Because they operated within venues on the margins of the official festival, the alternative scene became known as the Fringe (later Edinburgh Festival Fringe)*" [Encyclopedia Britannica].

The name reappears with a different weight and meaning in the contribution by Nihal Soganci and Ellada Evangelou: they discuss the making of Buffer Fringe Festival, an art festival that takes place at the fringes of the post-conflict buffer zone of divided Cyprus, around the famous border crossing of Ledra Palace Hotel. With "fringe(s)", we hence embrace an ethnographically arising notion from within the performing arts that serves us as a conceptual, introductory anchorage for exploring positionalities and hegemonies in the different ethnographic contexts that follow in this issue. Part of this interest is in the methodologies and techniques through which such agency may be expressed and performed in positionalities that are held together by historically evolved configurations of struggle and vulnerability. This interest has been sparked by anthropological work on "Peripheral Methodologies" [Martinez,

Di Puppo & Fredrikson 2021], which has drawn attention to peripherality as a method of thought and experience, exploring the potential of seeking insight beyond knowing and conventional consciousness. Inspired by this approach, we are open to the idea that inhabiting the fringes and creating them may also demand peripheral (or fringe) methodologies that need different forms of researcher engagement to grasp them, including the body, internal monologues, or collaborative methods.

There are significant parallels between the concept of the fringe and what cultural theoretician and artist Svetlana Boym [2017] described as "the logic of edginess". In Boym's writing, edginess comes with an activist proposition for creative communities on the margins.[1] The "logic of edginess" is part of her off-modern project, in which she called for a focus on "alternative solidarities between cultures that often circumscribe the center, creating a broad margin for peripheral scenographies" [Boym: 6]. What our concept of the fringe and the logic of edginess have in common, is recognizing the possibility of a unique, vulnerable positionality that is not necessarily marginal, but that is based on inhabiting the margins (or fringes), deliberately, self-standingly and creatively. Svetlana Boym explained this as follows:

> "*The logic of edginess (..) exposes wounds, scars, cuts, ruins, the afterimage of touch. (..) The off-modern edges aren't sites of marginality but those broad margins where one could try to live deliberately, against all odds, in the age of shrinking space and resources and forever accelerating rhythms. To be edgy, then, could also mean avoiding the logic of the cutting edge, even if the temptation is great. Edginess takes time*" [Boym 2017: 26].

With the practice of dwelling in these margins or fringes, performing arts events can relate, resist, and create alternative visions to a dominant perspective. If Boym called such a dominant perspective the "cutting edge", following the metaphor of the fringe in this issue, we can think of this dominant perspective as fluctuating hegemonial main events that take the center stage at the time, and around which the fringes emerge, and from which they, eventually, emancipate, or which they can even fully replace.

When it comes to these "main events" along the fringes of which the performative art settings that we discuss are taking place (and losing touch), we suggest a broader definition of the term: while they can simply refer to an authorised cultural event that takes the mainstage to a less formally accepted one, they can also refer to a mainstream discourse within a community of performance art professionals (like the concept of "presence" in Latvian theatre as discussed by Rūta Muktupāvela's and

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[1] Edginess is a concept that also appears in the previously mentioned work on remoteness by Saxer and Andersson, who call remoteness "edgy" to highlight it as a negotiated process rather than spatial condition [2019: 4].

Anda Laķe's text), at the margins of which new, hybrid art forms are emerging. Those "main events" can also be binational diplomatic relationships and funding landscapes (like the German-Polish ones, about which Hannah Wadle writes in her article) at the fringes of which the cultural festival takes place. At the same time, main events, as we understand them in relation to the "fringes", can also refer to political urgencies that take the societal main stage. These are events endowed with a centralising force that relocates existing performing arts events to become marginal or finding themselves in relational position to a newly emerged central event of global impact. Alexandra Glaskovskaya's work on the Irish Festival dance community in Russia courageously describes the contrasting experiences of approximation and detachment while being at the shifting fringes of two major world-political emergencies – the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Russian War aggression on Ukraine.

As indicated above, the kind of fringe that we are referring to has more to itself than peculiar architectures within the margins – it has the capacity to become something in and of its own right, independent and meaningful on its own: like Edinburgh Fringe Festival that evolved thanks to its exceptional format globally as *the* place to perform for comedians and as *the* place to attend cutting-edge comedy for audiences, we can observe a similar tendency for the performing arts events that are discussed by our authors. Being more than spin-offs, counter-events or aspiring simulacrums, the settings at the fringes are seekers of new relationalities, ideas of community, memory, and senses of place and self: seekers of new forms of reconciliation on Cyprus, seekers of a different space of dialogue in post-Prussian Mazury, seekers of a bearable sense of personhood and community in Russia-at-War, seekers of new forms of being-there-together in (post-)COVID-19 theatre, seekers of new spaces of knowledge creation between the arts and the social sciences. While they might emerge from different kinds of marginalizing relationalities or repeatedly experience those, they strongly speak in their own voice and make propositions that stand on their own feet.

Intersections: Performing Arts, Anthropology and Taking Place

Without this being the condition for participating in this publication, most of the authors share a proximity to their research subject and happen to be themselves involved in producing performing arts settings in one way or the other. Their ethnographic fields, cultural activisms, and transnational identities can be pictured to lie, to return to this earlier used image, on a möbius strip [cf. Ana 2023]. This makes the resulting special issue one with exceptional insights that stem from critical engagement with theory and analytical scrutiny on research data, and from personal experience, practical knowledge and a genuine concern with transformative creating arts settings. The voices that this issue collates bridge the often-remote worlds of

academic debates and the knowledge exchange of practitioners. They prove that we can create an intellectually engaging, yet honest, down-to-earth conversation that includes both perspectives and fruitfully marries them, fulfilling the promise of novelty for readers with expertise in either of those perspectives.

If we have previously noted a growing interest in anthropologically understanding performing arts settings, there has also been an increasing interpolation/ cross-fertilization between the arts and the social sciences more broadly speaking and in terms of interdisciplinary/ intersectional knowledge exchange. I am referring here specifically to the debates and new practices that were initiated in social anthropology, the subject tradition I am embedded in and from which I am writing. For some time now, art practitioners have grown their interest in methods, questions and theoretical groundings that social scientists, for instance social anthropologists and ethnographers, are using to critically address contemporary issues [cf. Foster 1996]. Meanwhile anthropologists have also started actively engaging with new possibilities that the arts and creative art settings have opened for anthropological knowledge creation, with new forms of collaboration, and models of engagement with the social [cf. Schneider and Wright 2013; Lehrer 2013; D'Onofrio 2017; Laborde 2018; Sjoberg 2018; Rakowski 2019].

If, not long ago, cultural production and the curation of arts settings had been distant fields to social anthropologists, present tendencies suggest strong intersections that are likely to deepen and possibly even formalize in the future [Lehrer & Meng 2015; Sansi 2019; von Oswald and Tinius 2020]. Drawn to the (performing) arts through their social transformative potential and their deeply experimental, exploratory character, social anthropologists, together with other social scientists, have become involved with them not merely as researchers, but often also as practitioners [Kazubowski-Houston 2010; Kuligowski and Poprawski 2023; Schneider 2017; Auslander et al. 2022]. This issue further pursues the concern that since "getting one's hands dirty" through forms of engaged, practice-oriented research/research-oriented practice, in this case with the arts, has become part of a new professional standard in social anthropology and other social sciences disciplines, it is crucial to establish critical frameworks for it; scholars-practitioners need to thoroughly self-enquire, *how* this is put into practice and what outcomes are to be anticipated.

In their ethnographic and often auto-ethnographic explorations around the making of performing arts settings, the articles of this special issue contribute to emerging frameworks for critical self-inquiry regarding the processes and outcomes of researcher engagement with the arts. In their respective field sites, the authors unpack the complex processes through which festivals, theatre performances, and dance performances come into existence. An important part are their reflections

on different entanglements with the "taking place" of these settings, including their personal entanglements as researchers and, in some cases, researchers-cum-practitioners: dancers, curators, producers. At the same time, experiences of losing touch and detachment shape the authors' research methodologies. A key ingredient that the contributors add to this issue is their vulnerability as involved researchers – either involved in cultural interventions and artistic activities, or involved in shaping ongoing debates with the artistic and cultural production environment. Being vulnerable here means a level of both self-reflection and introspection that reveals intimate thoughts and internal tensions of the author.

Hannah Wadle discusses the politics of taking place around a cross-genre community festival that she is the founder of. It is situated around a former East-Prussian country estate in the Masurian Lake District in Northeast Poland. Through ethnographic observations, she dissects the way, in which state power and international diplomacy intersect with grass roots initiatives in unequal relations, and how she and the festival become engaged for foreign politics. Using the method of internal monologues, she exposes the inner ambiguity about decisions she has made in her long-term field site in the role of an entangled anthropologist. The observed process spans over seven years, including the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine, with both events having untypical consequences for the evolving character of the festival.

Exploring Elmārs Seņkovs' digital performance "The Iranian Conference" (a play by Ivan Vyrypaev), Rūta Muktupāvela and Anda Laķe debate the perspectives of digital innovations in drama that took place during the pandemic condition and its physically detached mode. They assess the ground rules of an important concept in international and Latvian theatre, namely the "sense of presence" (*klātbūtnes sajūta*) asking, to what extent it may be compatible or not with new, digital interventions into the theatrical space that risk to detach audiences and actors from the experience of "taking place".

In Alexandra Glaskovskaya's article about the international Festival Irish Dance community and its Russian-national members, we experience the precarious, changing and unpredictable modalities of belonging to a network of dance enthusiasts. Glaskovskaya describes how the pandemic detached dancers physically while pushing the boundaries for inclusion, allowing peripheral dancers to participate digitally. During this time, the dancing body becomes both a tool of participation and an inquiry about it. After Russia's attack on Ukraine, detachment in the Russian Irish dancing scene obtained a different meaning: Between feelings of guilt about dancing during the War, the experience of being excluded from events in the Irish festival dancing network, the fear of state repressions against critical opinions and a crisis about holding the citizenship of an attacking state, detachment now referred

to the imagined community of the nation (and the desire to detach from it), as well as to the actual international network of the dance community (and the sorrow of being excluded).

The Cypriot Buffer Fringe Performing Arts Festival of Nicosia and its altered situation during the pandemic is presented by Nihal Soganci and Ellada Evangelou, who are also the curators of the event. The authors introduce their readers to the conflicted context in which the festival takes place, the formerly UN-controlled buffer zone and explain its continuous politicization – as space of governmentality and as liminal, affective and decolonizing space of resistance. While reaching into the difficult pasts of the island, the particular focus of the paper are the pandemic and post-pandemic festival editions. The organisers are in the taxing position of creating an event in a fragile, liminal spot that is subjected to unforeseeable border closures and other political measures. The article discusses the organisers' determination to make the event happen during the COVID-19 Pandemic against these odds and fragilities through methods of spatial detachment and hybrid entanglements. They learnt from this detachment and created a sustainable, solidary post-pandemic festival format that enables its "taking place" consistently and collectively.

Finally, the article on a collaborative arts-based research project develops a set of methods, offers its own approach to the ideas of entanglement and detachment: through the collaboration and knowledge exchange between artists and social scientists, young artists are encouraged to new form of perpetual reflexivity, by means of which they gain more insight into their own social and global entanglements. The social science perspective also helps develop their skill to see themselves and their art from a distance and in the context of the experiences of others.

Entanglement, in the process of creating performing art settings, can thus mean different things – it can mean the ways, in which researchers get involved in a field of relationships and tasks as practitioners in the arts, but also the entanglement of an entire event or community in larger, historical power relationships, political configurations; it can refer to being physically involved in embodied experiences, movements and co-presence; or, it can also refer to entanglement in webs of knowledge exchange. Through their ethnographic elaborations and their cultural analyses, the authors of this issue give further evidence that entanglement need not be the incompatible opposition to detachment, but appears rather as its mutually constitutive partner in what could be called a methodology of taking place. This emerging methodology of taking place takes shape in the articles through the prism of detachment and entanglement. This implies that, as the authors are critically investigating the conditions for creating performance art settings, they draw particular attention to remoteness and proximity, to participation and exclusion, to knowing and doing, to acting and being acted upon. In doing so, they trace the

specific precariousness and vulnerabilities in different configurations of "taking place" during and beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic.

In conclusion to this introduction to the special issue, one point seems to be of particular importance: All articles give vivid evidence of how fruitful the position between practice and research can become – and what kinds of reflections and "reports" are possible when we look deeper into the layers of time and behind the facades of common assumptions and reflect critically about our own positionality and practice in the field. Rather than fetishizing research engagement, this issue's papers normalize it, foregrounding the necessity of establishing a debate on professionalism that includes introspection, scrutiny, and approaches to structure and power. On these grounds, the insights and conclusions made by the authors may find an echo also in the community of practitioners whose bars for accuracy and honesty about practices of making performing arts settings are high. They will thus hopefully flow in different directions and find their paths to different audiences – reaching from the academic community to practitioners in the cultural sector and in the legislative, political sphere.

Acknowledgements

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