

CHAPTER 9

Performing Young Adults' Reflections on Work, Citizenship, and Democracy

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Abstract: Can theatre be a significant arena for reflections on work as an essential part of life for youth and young adults? This chapter reports on an arts-based research project that involved a cultural centre (ISAK) and participants aged 15–30 over a period of seven months. The overall framing perspective was an ethos of equality and a concept of dissensus inspired by the works of Jacques Rancière. The chapter discusses in particular Democratic forum, a workshop designed so the participants could reflect on, and perform, dreams, questions and challenges concerning work as part of their life and future. It also incorporated the development of exercises as well as the use of artistic ensemble, focal point and metaphor for further dramaturgical work. In the making of the performance *Happy Land 2048*, strategies for post-dramatic dramaturgy were applied, and this chapter discusses how experiences from Democratic forum can also be transformed into aesthetic experiences for an audience. Throughout an interactive performative event, the audience was co-performing in six different functions.

Keywords: democratic forum, interactive performance, work, crises

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Introduction: Happy Land 2048 - an applied arts-based research project

Director Welcome
 Welcome to Happy Land
 Welcome to 2048
 What are you going to be?
 What is your dream job?
 What kind of job will make you happy?
 Welcome to seek happiness in Happy Land
 (Excerpt from the opening of the performance)

The Cultural Centre ISAK (<https://isak.no/>) arranges various arts and cultural activities and brings together a wide range of youth and young adults, including several youth and student theatre companies in the city of Trondheim. My idea was to explore the topic of “work” together with young people and, through collaboration with the producer at ISAK, the centre became a professional non-academic research partner. There was an important double goal: to increase interest and further competence in theatre, and, secondly, to create an interesting performance at ISAK. An invitation to prospective participants was developed and made public, informing about two phases: first, the investigation of theme, and, second, the creation of performance. Participants did not have to commit for the entire period of seven months. Information about the project was available on ISAK’s website throughout the whole period.

In phase one, around 20 people attended, once or more frequently, two-hour weekly workshops spread over five weeks. They were asylum seekers as well as Norwegians and international exchange students, all aged 16–39. Thanks to the open invitation, and because it became a heterogeneous group, there was soon a climate of great diversity of experiences and opinions and a positive attitude towards new inputs and responses. We actively invited participants who were not primarily interested in theatre, and their voices and backgrounds became important both for developing research questions and for approaches to the theatre production. According to the ISAK producer, such an open group-based and “devised” production platform was new to the theatre-people at ISAK. This made it challenging to

recruit participants especially interested in theatre. The initial collaborative process in devised theatre projects is often both intense and confusing. As a facilitating director-researcher, I consciously wanted to give priority to voluntary participation, an open exchange of experiences and the emergence of questions, rather than simply hand out a hypothesis, with clear, pre-set plans, purely to cater for participants' desire for predictability. It created a dilemma I chose not to solve in this phase.

Phase two was led by the researcher in close collaboration with the scenographer, the producer and an artistic team of eight film- and theatre students. This artistic team developed and extended into a dynamic relationship between participants, presenting competences they wanted to share and develop, and co-operating with digital media expressions and needs in the aesthetic communication. Two groups of 6 and 20 audience members participated in showcases with critical response process (Aune, 2018).

Methodology and theoretical framework

The chosen arts-based research design (Haseman, 2006; Nelson, 2013) includes an ethnographic approach where participants are considered as co-researchers, not informants (Denzin, 1997). This is important in order to draw on experiences and resources in the specific context. A research design dominated by experimental and improvisational modes of work generates and presents findings in, and through, an interactive performance production: Happy Land 2048. To conduct research within a performative paradigm also requires elaboration and reflection on methodological and aesthetic decisions, and on how documentation and reflection are integrated as essential tools. However, while acknowledging the importance of the role of co-researchers, Robin Nelson (2013) underlines the researcher as the central knowledge-producing subject (p. 37). Hence it is the researcher's responsibility to clarify the theoretical framing perspectives, make explicit the guiding intentions and choices made, and be aware of the specific context and its existing relationships. Important also is a self-reflexive attention to the researcher's roles and functions.

As a facilitator I tried to adapt a high degree of open and mutual communication. I documented the workshops in a report, including significant statements and reflections on further opportunities. The report was distributed by email to participants and discussed in the next workshop. During the workshops in the first phase participants wrote on post-it notes in different colours and these were mounted as wall newspapers. This served as a support in presentations, as shared visual archives and as drafts for dramaturgy. Reports and wall newspapers were widely used as common continuity-creating empirical material. Furthermore, I wrote drafts of dialogues, and these served as a poetic form of documentation and as text material for improvisational work. Two of the participating students analyzed parts of the process for their written assignments and these works have been freely available as mutual information and as a basis for reflection.

Jacques Rancière's theories on democracy and performative aesthetics act as a framework for our democratic and aesthetic strategies and also serve to enlighten dilemmas that occur in the process (see "Concluding thoughts"). Rancière's (2004) notion of aesthetic distribution includes sensuous and bodily experience in the ways we understand our being in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1994). His view on "political subjectivation" (Nash, 1996) fits in with theories on performativity where self-construction takes place both in verbal and theatrical acts and in reflecting between these forms of being (Schechner, 2002). The design which fosters reflection through aesthetic experiences therefore emphasizes the importance of a dynamic relationship between different ways of communication; conversation and oral presentations, improvisation and role playing, and performing for an audience. A fusing of systematic and critical reflective representation of experience together with scenic presentation, characterizes postmodern performing arts based on lived life (Aune, 2017a, 2017b; Martin, 2010; Saldaña, 2005, 2011). Rancière's view on democracy rests on his conviction that a basic human equality and the right to utter/stage dissensus are human rights in healthy democracies. This became instrumental in Democratic forum, a workshop design for our arena for young adults to raise their voices about work as part of their lives today and in the future. These forums had a fixed form: a brief introduction of

a question or aspect regarding *work* was followed by a group/individual exercise and a sharing. The forum closed by reflecting on questions for further investigation. The first four forums revolved around two issues: the concept of free choice of employment, and work as community, meaning and self-development. The closing Democratic forum summed up and developed a focal point and a metaphor for working out the performance.

Democratic forum 1: Disclosing the myth of the right to work and free choice of employment

The first paragraph in Article 23 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights was chosen as material for the first Democratic forum. This paragraph reads: “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.” (UN, 1948). Norway ratified the Declaration in 1948 and it has been fundamental to all policy areas, including work and education. The Declaration has been accused of being an expression of Western domination and a legitimation for military, economic and cultural abuse of power and arrogance (Rathore & Cistelean, 2011). Moreover, Rancière (2011) argues that the Declaration is written as a representation of a society in which all individuals are seemingly free and equal. It gives the appearance of equality, equal rights and opportunities freed from social contexts and individual life stories (Rancière, 2011, p. 173). “Political subjectivation” is a process of verifying or activating the right of equality, and to bridge subjective existence and the Human Rights. Inspired by Rancière’s views we wanted to facilitate actions for the participants to examine and perform their understanding of Article 23, towards a process of becoming critically reflected subjects and citizens.

In the first forum exercise, *Green, Yellow and Red Card*, each participant was given three coloured cards and one of the statements in the first paragraph of Article 23 (see above). Participant 1 read her statement, tagged it to the green card for *agree*, red for *disagree* or yellow for *not sure*. The choice of colour had to be justified. Then the others in turn

laid down their choice of card and accounted for their choice. After this round, participant 1 repeated the statement and the participants were able to change their cards. The routine was repeated until all statements had been considered. The finding of this exercise was clear; all participants stated that the right to work is important, especially for young people. Work relates to income, community and identity and the opportunity to grow. Unemployment was considered “evil”, personally, socially and financially, and the participants shared experiences of meaninglessness, inferiority and isolation caused by unemployment. The participants stood together behind this statement, summarized by an exchange student: “It is a hunger for work.”

Furthermore, they doubted that the right to free choice of employment was valid for them. They experienced great discrepancies between official policy offering a variety of educational rights and their opportunities to get relevant work. Many had experienced short and temporary employment contracts and uncertain freelancing, and expressed a need for more predictability. Participants also shared uncertainty about what kind of employment and opportunities they would have in the future, especially with regard to the environmental crisis, robotization and globalization. The exercise *Green, Yellow and Red Card* offered a space to openly reflect on experiences because the exercise demanded justification (one had to account for one’s choices), accepted uncertainty and allowed participants to change their mind. The structured form helped to open the dialogue between the participants and the researcher. One participant put it this way:

The exercise gave us equal time and right to present individual views and doubts. It made us eager to listen to differences and reflect on each other. It warmed us up for the following conversation and people were really responsible and reflexive. (My translation)

The exercise revealed the right to work and free choice of employment as a myth in the dominant political narrative. It created insight into the paradox participants experienced between official politics, and the personal uncertainty associated with the opportunities to establish and realize their own interests and dreams of work. Moreover, the young

participants did not consider work as a question only for them as individuals. They related work to social responsibility and citizenship and confirmed Norwegian research findings showing that young adults see their narrative of work in a perspective of responsible solidarity (Bø & Håland, 2017; Hyggen, 2017; Stjernø & Øverby, 2012).

Democratic forum 2: Performing concepts of dreams, obstacles and strategies

The second Democratic forum followed up on participants' dreams and expectations. Some had clear careers in sight, while others were uncertain. In the exercise *Dramaturgy of the Character* participants could choose to start from themselves, or from an alias, or make up a fictional character, making for an open, playful response. The journey of the character towards the dream job was to be challenged by four types of obstacle: personal, relational, horizontal and vertical – and everyone had to search for strategies to overcome these obstacles. On post-it notes, in different colours, they wrote, under the name of the character chosen, goals, obstacles and strategies. In this way they visualized the dramaturgy of the character.

In a similar manner, participants reflected on personal and relational obstacles and strategies. Personal obstacles were education and school results, and strategies could be, for example, the determination to work harder to qualify and to become more secure in oneself and what one wanted in life. Relational obstacles was a category that included family and expectations of choosing secure jobs, for participants often hope for status equal to or higher than parents had. Even the absence of expectations – such as is revealed here: “You can be whatever you want. It's your choice!” – was considered to be an obstacle.

Norwegian participants showed difficulties identifying horizontal obstacles related to law, tradition, gender, ethnicity, age and social class. In this they seem to reflect the dominant ideology of equality in neo-liberal democracy (Rathore & Cistelean, 2011). Participants from other geographical backgrounds reflected more strongly on such structural obstacles:

I want to be a truck driver. Education is difficult due to language, but I work hard and don't get in trouble. I have no family to help but I will ask teachers and the refugee service. The horizontal obstacle is losing the right to asylum in Norway. Here I have no strategy, but if I get my license, I can work anywhere in the world.
(Based on participants' post-it notes and oral presentation; my translation.)

Vertical obstacles are apparently beyond human control. In theatre, especially in classical tragedies fatal crises are caused by the wrath of gods, plague, and the wars of tyrants. Vertical obstacles first appeared in our exercise when participants confronted the characters with apocalyptic future scenarios such as a breakdown in the global environment or the internet. Facing such obstacles they found no strategies to complete the dream of the character.

Whether characters were based in themselves, an alias or fiction, and regardless of background, they reflected with a high degree of confidence, trusted their own powers and devised creative solutions to personal, relational and horizontal obstacles. Despite both self-perceived and thought-provoking challenges, they did not see the characters as victims of circumstances. The exercise *Dramaturgy of the Character* offered a common space for performing dreams, expectations and challenges across backgrounds and life situations. The exercise highlighted the challenges of being co-responsible for realizing their own right to work both within the framework of the welfare state and in communities with far weaker social and economic safety nets.

Democratic forum 3: The issues of vertical obstacles to work

The third Democratic forum focused on characters struggling with vertical obstacles. The participants wrote on post-it notes the kinds of work they presumed might be of value in a future environmental crisis. They made notes in turn, as a starting point for interviews in role.

We did role playing on the mostly fictional jobs in the unknown and uncertain future and this triggered engagement, dramatic tension, joy, and creative playing. Again, participants' dreams and expectations were revealed: "If the internet breaks down, I cannot become a youtuber." "If the

oil ends, I cannot become a truck driver.” Not least, the exercise opened for reflections on how goals that are too fixed can reduce possibilities and perspectives, while the unexpected can open your mind. The role-playing method provided a meta-perspective on how one thinks about oneself and work. A story is told, the story is also a story of “telling one’s world”, and it points to the fragility of our daily ways of understanding.

Democratic forum 4: Performing concepts of community, meaning and self-development

By the word “work”, participants included income, meaning, community and the opportunity to develop. They excluded, for example, work being monotonous, boring, and meaningless, but added in the same breath: “But someone has to do it.” The fourth forum examined this paradox. In the exercise, they wrote on post-it notes the kinds of work they would identify as “shit jobs” and work they would identify as “status jobs”. In the following exercise they added smell, sound and movement associated with the different kinds of work. They were again encouraged to draw on their own experiences.

The participants strongly agreed that the value of high-status work was high income and a lot of power, concretized by the roles of a cabinet minister, bank manager, director, landowner, lawyer, doctor, and manager. High-status work was characterized as “odourless”, and was associated with distinct and low sound such as polite chatter and laughter and controlled movement. Presentations were characterized by clichés, references to media and to a lesser extent to their own experiences. “Shit jobs” were of low value because they are dull and routine and characterized by the smell of stools, blood, garbage and exhaust, the noise of people and machines, and physical wear and tear. In the participants’ presentations of these jobs, the various backgrounds appeared: work as miners, in agriculture and care, teaching, sales, office, transport and renovation. Participants referred to their own upbringing to a much greater extent, and several had positive experience from temporary work in these types of jobs.

In a joint exercise, participants reflected on the issue of “necessity work”. In the form of drawings, they portrayed frightening creatures threatening small individuals followed by a cheerful, critical, self-reflective

conversation: “How do we really think about how we think about ourselves, work and the others?” As in the interview in role exercise, this contributed to metafiction and deepened thematic reflection.

Democratic forum 5: Towards a production concept of the “Fairground”

Based on interest in both theme and performance, the participants chose the following shared statement: “The freedom to choose employment is replaced by luck and bad luck. Anyone wanting work must fish in a river where all sorts of work can be found.”

In devised performing arts projects, where participants seek critical reflection on aspects of reality, the establishment of a focal point is crucial (Aune, 2017a; Aune & Haagensen, 2018). It is about gathering fragments of dramatic tension into a shared starting place being “focused, clear and delimited. A point where the temperature rises to the maximum. A place where it starts to burn” (Rønning, 2018, p. 19). Memories of luck and bad luck and the excitement and happiness of seeking out risk further led to the metaphor *Fairground*, a theatrical place entertaining the audience through the staging of games of luck and bad luck, winners and losers. The development of a focal point and metaphor are statements of reflection at a metalevel; participants reflecting on their way of reflecting. This is a vital distancing quality for actors going to transform experiences into aesthetic communication with an audience.

Simultaneously with our process, young people in different parts in the world were taking part in a powerful international climate protest. This became the backdrop for our choosing the environmental crisis as a relevant framework for our dramaturgical work. The “right to work” formulated in 1948 came soon after the Second World War had torn down and overturned basic premises for the right and opportunity for young people to shape their own lives. The title of the performance emerged from an interest in questioning what might happen when young people search for work in 2048.

With these conceptual frameworks, the growing arts project took a different direction from document-based forms such as ethno-theatre

and documentary theatre. In line with Rancière's notion that art may approach politics by contributing to a new division of material and symbolic space (Rancière, 2008, pp. 536–537), we found that aesthetic experiences in an unusual and unknown time-space dimension allowed for the reinterpretation of social reality, the establishment of new, self-owned perspectives and an opportunity for emancipation. Against the background of the environmental crisis we revealed dominant behaviours and ways of thinking and explored the possibilities, obstacles, and alternative strategies of resistance.

The next level of the cultural-democratic approach: Towards staging the audience in an interactive performative event

The final performance was adapted to the ISAK venue and theatre festival at ISAK and aimed to be a relevant and entertaining performative event for youth and young adults. We wanted to involve the audience in an aesthetic space, so they would experience states of ambivalence and rupture, and participate in discussions and possibly in the formulation of some answers. I am aware that spectators' participation is not a guarantee of equality and democracy (Bishop, 2012, p. 284; Rancière, 2008, pp. 21–22). There must be an object, story or event – a medium that both spectators and participants can negotiate or a narrative they can interpret. The dramaturgical process therefore concerned both the design of the fictional world and the staging of the audience in relation to actors, room and objects. The material was to be found in notes and reports and in the embodied knowledge of participants, and a researcher gradually shifted role from being a facilitator to becoming a director. One challenge was to recall the most potent moments of experience and develop them into dramaturgical form. Flowing from an overriding interest in the relationship between aesthetics and politics, the aim was to create an interactive, performative event: “It is no longer the stage but the theatre as a whole which functions as the ‘speaking space’”(Lehmann, 2006, p. 31). We started to develop a space and improvise with visuals and objects, followed by the integration of body, text and film, music and light. The development

of dramaturgical strategies was led by the director in close collaboration with the scenographer, the ISAK producer and the artistic team. Two groups participated in showcases with a critical response process (Aune, 2018) and these responses were of great importance to the work. In Happyland 2048 the audience are exposed to six different interactive strategies, some of which were hinted at in a pre-performance posted on social media. The presentation refers to a scenario in six sequences for five characters and a participating audience.

Audiences staging themselves as playful subjects

A video display outside the venue: The director (character) welcomes visitors. The assistant (character) demonstrates how visitors can get access to Happy Land 2048 by writing their dream job on a card and attaching it to their forehead with a rubber band.

Film is a popular activity at ISAK and we added a new, very competent young member to the artistic team. Inspired by a board game, *Kortskalle*, the video invites members of the audience to a playful activity where they can identify with any dream job, without being confronted with the truth of its content. The video sequence launches an extraordinary world represented by the Director, elegantly dressed, and accompanied by caressing, amusing music. The video makes a ritual for access demonstrated by the Assistant.

Audience staged as objects of luck and bad luck

As they have entered the stage, the audience must give away their personal written card. They are going to fish for a job. The Director appeals to enthusiasm.

The venue is an elongated stage designed for 30 audience members and the five actors. In the middle is an oval pond surrounded by sparkling light chains, and on a richly decorated bridge stands the Director,

welcoming “visitors”. Due to the design of the pond, audiences and actors can see each other and everyone can see the Director. The pond is filled with orange, yellow, blue and green bathing ducks and on each duck is a card attached with the title of a type of work. Fishing rods are placed around the pond. The showcase revealed that the audience needed guidance into the venue and the Assistant led the group into a circle around the pond.

In creating the 2048 labour market in an environmentally friendly future, the pond contained 65 % necessity work, 15 % teaching jobs, 15 % management jobs and 5 % creative professions. Each category had jobs producing communication, food, energy and empathy. Having to swap the dream job for a casual, unknown, or unusual job was a critical point for the showcase audiences, as it was for participants in Democratic forums. The challenge was to establish a space that cared for emotional response without losing momentum in the excitement of the play. The audience faced uncertainty, frustration and rupture, as well as passive resistance and withdrawal. Without disclosing their function, actors moved around the pond, initiated conversations, failed to communicate with each other or the Director, and helped the Assistant in distributing places and fishing rods. The Director’s monologue combined flattery and accusatory threats and, together with the music, the soundscape created the atmosphere for the temporal setting of 2048. The pond was emptied of ducks, and luck and bad luck were distributed through chance and political demagoguery.

Audiences staged as audience

Characters Alessia, Lasse and Hermann are pulled out for an Extra Chance and given three new opportunities. Confrontations with the Director develop into conflicts as they accuse each other of imposing impossible demands on content, status, and value of the work they catch. The Director leaves.

The three characters are developed from fragments presented by the participants, including the actors. Thus, Alessia is also a representation of the actor’s own dream of a performative profession, and Hermann’s total

lack of orientation is an expression of the actor looking back at himself as an 18 year old. Lasse represents statements like: “I want to be a journalist, but I can well become a caregiver if it doesn’t work.” The Director is representing the ideology of crises, where the need for control of work trumps all individual interests. Dreams, frustration, and anger about not being successful, respected and understood, are met with the Director’s rhetorical phrases: “In a complex and uncertain world we, alternatively, all, alternatively, must all understand that . . .”

In this sequence the audience watch the stage actions, still within the contract of equal ratio developed in earlier sequences. Even the smallest form of interaction is a push towards courage and interest in interaction with actors and each other. Hence the audience show engagement and identification when characters are challenged by unknown or “necessity work”. In order to secure co-ownership of the experiences and co-creatorship of the aesthetic communication played out, the actors needed to combine presence in interaction, flexibility and responsibility for progress of theme and conflicts, as well as a cautious use of theatricality in line with the audience’s playfulness. During improvisational rehearsals the actors had developed a useful repertoire, a toolbox of strategies in interacting with the audience: sympathetic strategies such as swapping, giving and begging, and unsympathetic strategies such as tricking, stealing, lying.

Audiences staged as members of jury

The three characters are standing on the bridge, asking the audience to judge their dreams versus the regime in Happy Land 2048. Audiences make judgements by moving to the same side as a character, to the opposite side or to somewhere in the middle. In turn, the actors interview audiences.

At this stage of the performance event, several members of the audience had forgotten both their personal written cards and the one they got while fishing, and these now received renewed attention. Those who take a clear stand for or against a character often argue from the perspective of the character and reflect on how they identify with his/her point of view. The

members who place themselves in the midfield more often refer directly to their own dreams and future challenges. After these responses, more members of the audience swap places.

Audiences staged in an open discussion

Hermann asks for help to understand what kind of work belongs in communication, food, energy and empathy. He asks the audience to gather in groups – giving very unclear instructions.

Amongst the audience, many had “fished” unusual and unknown work, and the four categories mentioned represented an unusual form of classification. In our show cases there was no need for active participation from actors nor the Assistant. Hermann’s messy leadership triggered a high level of interactivity and conversations and movements intersected at the venue. Gradually, small groups emerged arguing they have work of equal and similar importance to the community. Particularly the category of empathy opened surprising reflections, such as: “I wanted to be a writer, but then I became a bird guard. I think it’s good and important to work with empathy in the future.” (My translation)

Audiences returned to 2020

Assistant announces that Happy Land is closing. Everyone will find their access cards at the entrance.

Depending on the intensity of the interaction, the previous two sequences tended to be very long-lasting and sometimes outlasted their allotted time at the theatre festival. The performance ends in accordance with the fictional universe, the fairground is closing for the day. The performance does not attempt to summarise fixed answers. But we argue that this form of theatre offers a space for actor and audience to gain critical insight into dreams, opportunities and challenges, here creating their own work narrative. This is the pleasure and dilemma of applied post-dramatic theatre:

“The transition may not deliver immediate results, but it produces the possibility of change through dialogue and exposure that allow space for feeling, and are not bound to rhetoric” (Angelaki, 2017, p. 3).

Concluding thoughts

Our theatre research project had a double agenda. We wanted to add new knowledge to how theatre can be a significant space for critical, informative and entertaining experience and reflection. Secondly, we wanted to highlight questions of work as part of life and future for youth and young people, and essential for concepts of citizenship and democracy. This double intention sets premises for designing Democratic forum and for our dramaturgical strategy to include the staging of the audience in the performative event. We strove to follow an ethos of equality inspired by, among others, Jacques Rancière (2016), and found Democratic forum to be quite successful. It was sufficiently open to tempt different young people to share experiences, opinions and competences and it was sufficiently structured with plans and phases. It was inclusive, sharing all kinds of documentation and systematically using time on thematic as well as aesthetic decisions. It was, moreover, sufficiently slow to allow both theme and form to take hold and spread among participants and to create interest for the performance to come. It was sufficiently uncertain and complex to attract young adults with their powers, courage and skills to create something they experienced as entertaining, complex, critical and important.

However, the ideal of political subjectivation and dissensus, also inspired by Rancière, needs further, careful thought in a theatre process initiated and directed by a researcher. Despite our democratic intentions, the project gave me – as researcher and director – a tremendous advantage in that I could decide topic, develop questions, procedures and make aesthetic decisions on my own. It is essential to reflect on the power relations. How is power distributed by facilitation, and when does this distribution exclude someone’s voice? According to Rancière, politics as political action arises when the excluded uses an opportunity to express herself and take a seat in the common room (2004, p. 70). This is why we did not start from clear hypotheses, pre-set questions and a production

concept, but applied techniques, methods, and competences that accorded with the chosen venue and its motivated participants. The facilitating director-researcher navigated in a state of dilemma, listening to the participants and to her own intentions, ongoing reflections, and ideas. We strove to find the design that embodied a dynamic relationship between the researcher's knowhow and performance-sensitive presence and experiences with the artistic and cultural competence of participants. However, it must be admitted that this unpredictable platform did not suit everybody or all situations, and I did not solve the dilemma arising from youth at ISAK primarily wanting to play theatre.

Finally, two days before the first performance, the ISAK venue was closed due to the Covid-19 lockdown. The Covid-19 crisis made the questions raised highly relevant as it revealed the fragility of the welfare state. Young workers are the first to lose their jobs, and among these are students doing part-time work while they study, and other young people on the doorstep of the work market. Many participants in Happy Land 2048 shared dreams of a future in the professions of the performing arts and some had experience as freelance artists, dancers, and singers. Conversations about this topic was an undercurrent throughout the project period and the performance provided no secure answers. However, the performing arts project became an arena for open and broad reflections on being an artist in the future. One participant said: "Now I have become even more eager to be an actor and make important, engaging theatre." Another had second thoughts: "Perhaps I better get an ordinary job. Get me a home and a workplace". At the moment of the shutdown, we sat together preparing the last pieces of scenography. As it was time to leave, one of the actors raised his voice to express a common experience: "We are about to create something that really matters to young adults."

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