

Call for Applications
International PhD-Workshop
“Creating Access”
Institut for Theater Studies, Bern University, Switzerland
Wednesday, May 7th - Monday, May 12th 2025

For the seventh edition of **itw : in dialog. Forschungen zum Gegenwartstheater**, a doctoral workshop will take place from May 7 - 12, 2025 (departure May 12, 2025). Under the title “Creating access”, the following will be examined: methods in theater and dance studies, critical questioning of knowledge production with and through performative practices as well as the examination of one's own understanding of theater and dance.

The workshop will take place alongside and embedded in the international theatre festival auawirleben in Bern. The workshop will consist of:

- a) Attendance at performances and other festival events
- b) Conversations and interviews with artists and the festival team
- c) Sessions to discuss theory and methodology
- d) Presentations of participants' research

Information about the application:

- Please submit a **letter of motivation** or a **video** (max. 500 words / 8 minutes), an **abstract** of your dissertation (max. 500 words) and a short **CV** (max. 200 words) via email by March 3, 2025.
- The costs for travel, accommodation and theater tickets will be covered.
- We will strive to meet the access needs of the participants and, if necessary, acquire funding for this purpose.
- There are 10 spots available. Attendance for the entire duration of the doctoral workshop is required.

Workshop team:

Dr. des. Nele Solf (conception and host), Prof. Dr. Alexandra Portmann and Elena Thoma (conception and organization) in cooperation with auawirleben Theaterfestival Bern.

Project contact: Elena Thoma (elena.thoma@unibe.ch)

“Creating Access”

The German-speaking theater landscape has been undergoing significant change since the early 2010s. Marginalized artists who have long been excluded from training and subsidized performance opportunities are taking center stage. Racialized, disabled and queer theater makers create performances under their own artistic direction and at the same time question existing norms of theatrical aesthetics, working methods and relationships with audiences. These processes impact institutions as well and change perspectives towards and from audiences, which are increasingly thought of as heterogeneous. Many theaters have begun to work with organizational development experts to examine barriers and discriminatory structures within their practices and infrastructures. Since the 2010s, awareness of the need for a critical examination of structural discrimination has also grown in performance studies. In the workshop, we will use the Bern theater festival *auawirleben* as an example to ask how artists, institutions and audiences create access for themselves and for each other.

International theater festivals are not only an important platform for theater professionals to work together, go on tour and present their work to an international audience. They are often also sites to explore alternative working methods, collaborations and experiments. The *auawirleben* theater festival has a long tradition of bringing international, mostly European theater to Bern. Since 2016, the festival has been developing its accessibility strategy together with people with disabilities and is constantly striving to lower barriers. This inclusivity process encompasses the curation, the audience as well as the festival staff. Invited artists bring accessibility strategies that the festival adopts in sustainable ways. Other artists are supported in making their performances more accessible for showings at *auawirleben*. The festival also develops decentralizing strategies at the curatorial level, such as the “Bring a Friend” programme or this year's co-curation with Dan Daw and Liz Counsell from Dan Daw Productions.

During the workshop, we will observe the first days of the festival and get an impression of the strategies used by attending performances and talking to the team and artists. In doing so, we will question both the festival and our own normative perspectives and research premises critically. Through readings and discussions, we will embed this examination in a broader research context on institutional diversification, accessibility, inclusion and exclusion in German-language theater. The workshop will also provide an opportunity to exchange on our own research projects, the issues we face and address there and our positionalities as researchers.

Applications for participation are welcome from those concerned with accessibility, inclusion, exclusion and mechanisms of othering in theater. In this context, explorations of processes of institutional self-questioning and institutional change, critical audience research, disability arts and aesthetics of access, the queering and crippling of German-language theater, post-colonial and post-migrant strategies are particularly welcome. The workshop leader, Nele Solf, positions herself as white, neurodivergent and queer.

Literatur

Ahmed, Sara: *On Being Included. Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham, London 2012.

Castro Varela, María do Mar; Haghghat, Leila (Hg.): *Double Bind postcolonial. Kritische Perspektiven auf Kunst und Kulturelle Bildung*. Bielefeld 2023.

FAIRSTAGE (Hg.): Repräsentation, Leerstellen, Ausschlüsse. Über diversitätssensibles Arbeiten an Theatern. 2. Aufl. Berlin 2024.

Kreuser, Mirjam: Crip-Queere Körper. Eine kritische Phänomenologie des Theaters. Bielefeld 2023.

Layne, Priscilla; Tonger-Erk, Lily (Hg.): Staging Blackness. Representations of Race in German-Speaking Drama and Theater. Ann Arbor 2024.

Leggett, Alexander: Quirky dramaturgy in contemporary UK theatre: autism, participation and access. Birkbeck 2023.

Liepsch, Elisa; Warner, Julian (Hg.): Allianzen: Kritische Praxis an weißen Institutionen. Bielefeld 2018.

Mwambene, Mbene; Büch, Michel: White Promise. Performance Artist Mbene Mwambene in Conversation. In: De Gruyter Conversations, 31.05.2022, <https://blog.degruyter.com/white-promise-performance-artist-mbene-mwambene-in-conversation/>.

Neises, Sophia: Aesthetics of Access. In: Diversity Arts Culture (Hg.): Wörterbuch. 20.01.2023, <https://diversity-arts-culture.berlin/woerterbuch/aesthetics-access>.

Schmidt, Yvonne: Ausweitung der Spielzone. Experten, Amateure, behinderte Darsteller im Gegenwartstheater. Zürich 2020.

Skwirblies, Lisa; Sharifi, Azadeh (Hg.): Theaterwissenschaft postkolonial/dekolonial. Bielefeld 2022.