

Unfinished Business
A Conversation on the State of Curating in the Performing Arts

3 April 2025

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF

Diana Anselmo
Performer, visual artist and accessibility manager

Irene Calderoni
Artistic director, Scuola Piccola Zattere

Piersandra Di Matteo
Theorist, curator, and dramaturge

Tomasz Kireńczuk
Artistic director, Santarcangelo Festival

Anna Mülter
Artistic director, Theaterformen

INITIATED AND CURATED BY

Edoardo Lazzari
Independent curator and researcher

EDOARDO LAZZARI: Hello everyone, and thank you for being here. Today's conversation wants to be a public moment coming about from the encounter between two fellowships currently underway at Scuola Piccola Zattere: mine and Diana Anselmo's. This meeting is not the outcome of a pre-defined programme, but rather the result of a shared process that has developed over time—through conversations, exchanges of views and parallel research paths that gradually asked to become public.

When Diana and I realized that our trajectories—albeit very different in terms of methods and fields of inquiry—were nevertheless animated by a common desire to rethink curatorial practices, especially in relation to openness, access and collective forms of knowledge, we decided to create this moment together. We imagined it as a space where our individual research questions could intersect, resonate and be exposed to others.

My name is Edoardo. I am an independent curator and researcher, and I came to the Scuola Piccola upon Irene's invitation in order to continue my PhD research while also developing a set of personal inquiries into curatorial practices. At the moment, my work focuses on artistic forms of gathering and encounter, with particular attention to the assembly format: how, starting in the early 2000s, a number of artists and projects appropriated the model of the assembly and relocated it within the field of the performing arts, transforming it into both an aesthetic and a political tool.

This interest in assemblies, gatherings and collective formats is also what led us to imagine *Unfinished Business* not as a conference, but as a shared space of thinking that remains open, provisional and necessarily incomplete. In this sense, "unfinished" does not signal a shortcoming, but rather a deliberate condition—one that allows questions to stay active and meanings to remain negotiable.

Before going further, I would like to briefly introduce the context of the Scuola Piccola Zattere. This is not a school in the traditional sense,

but a space that experiments with education as a situated, collective and process-based practice. Within this framework, public moments like today's are not add-ons to research, but integral to it: they are occasions to test ideas, to expose them to friction and to allow them to be transformed through encounter.

With this in mind, I would like to invite everyone here—both at the table and in the audience—to consider this conversation a horizontal space. Please feel free to intervene, ask questions or complicate what is being said at any moment. The aim is not to reach conclusions, but to articulate shared questions that might continue to resonate beyond this room.

Diana, I will now pass over to you, so that you can introduce yourself and tell us about your research.

DIANA ANSELMO: Yes, my name is Diana Anselmo, and I have been here since early January. I am here for a three-month fellowship during which I will be conducting research on the first devices used for recording, reproducing and transmitting sounds, but approached from a *deaf* perspective. I am investigating how these devices—for example, the microphone and the telephone—were used as instruments to cure or rehabilitate deafness. This research will eventually become a performance that will premiere at the Theaterformen Festival, which is also why Anna Mülter is here with us today. The performance is also supported by the Santarcangelo Festival, whose artistic director, Tomasz, is here with us too!

The performance is currently being put together, the dramaturgy and everything. Together with Edoardo, we also had the idea to transform this into a public programme.

IRENE CALDERONI: I should mention that Diana is the only performer at today's round table; all the others are curators. So yes, it's really a table of curators—but “the artist is present” so to speak.

When we received Diana and Edoardo's proposal to organize this

meeting, we immediately saw how it aligned with the methodology we are trying to apply here: to create real synergy and an ecology among the artists who are in residence, and to support their practices through different tools. This includes facilitating meetings with professionals, building support structures, forming partnerships and creating occasions to share research-in-progress through common gatherings and public programmes.

Our first ambition is for the pro tem community created by contemporaneously hosting different people and practices to offer the conditions for mutual engagement, so that everyone can nourish the others' practices and research, and find a meaningful common ground in the collective production of knowledge. At the same time, our aim is for this process to platform a broader notion of education—core to this project—through the idea of calling this art space a *school*: not a school in the traditional sense, but something else, something different. Today's meeting, also with the presence of Piersandra, is hopefully a way to share experiences and knowledge, and to enable exchanges about our shared profession.

TOMASZ KIREŃCZUK: Now let me introduce myself. I am Tomasz Kireńczuk. I originally come from Poland and moved to Italy in the autumn of 2021 when I started working for the Santarcangelo Festival. I am the festival's artistic director. I have been working as a performing arts curator for many years. Previously, I created an event in Poland called the Dialog Festival and I also ran an independent venue in Kraków, where I founded the Teatr Nowy.

When I moved to Italy, I initially wanted to understand how the institutional system in the performing arts sector works here. To tell the truth, even after three years, I still haven't managed to fully work it out—and I don't think I will have done by the end of my contract either, because it's really complicated.

So, the topic of today's meeting and discussion resonates deeply with me. Over the past few years at Santarcangelo—besides, of course,

programming the festival, which is our core mission—we have been trying to understand, together with my colleagues and various partners both in Italy and abroad, how we can use the tools of a festival and the visibility of the Santarcangelo Festival to create new mechanisms to support artistic processes and research. This is particularly important to me because I find one of the major problems in the Italian system is that it is heavily based on overproduction and the exploitation of artists.

That's why we have been developing different kinds of projects, collaborations, networks—both nationally and internationally—including residencies and various other programmes. Today, I would say that about half of our energy goes into these annual or ongoing projects that are not directly connected to the festival itself. This is something we are very proud of, because it shows how we can leverage the recognition and visibility that an institution like Santarcangelo has, and use it to share and create new opportunities.

PIERSANDRA DI MATTEO: Hello everyone. I'm grateful for this shared space of exchange, where reflecting with colleagues and artists allows the questions emerging from our work to be heard and take collective form.

My name is Piersandra Di Matteo. I am a dramaturge, curator and researcher working in the field of the contemporary performing arts. My practice has always been deeply connected to questions of institutional critique, experimental dramaturgies and the creation of spaces for situated and collective knowledge.

Since 2021, I have been the artistic director of Short Theatre in Rome, a multidisciplinary festival where I try to experiment with new formats of assembly and curating. Alongside curatorial work, I am engaged in research, teaching, mentoring, and publishing—conceiving theory and practice not as separate domains, but as a continuous feedback loop in which curation can operate as a political, poetic, and transformative practice. I just want to say that I'm very happy we have the chance to discuss, together with colleagues and artists, many of the

issues we address during the lessons here. I invite you all to be part of the discussion.

ANNA MÜLTER: In Germany, I am involved in a festival that actually alternates between two cities. One year we are in Hannover—which is where Diana will be—and the next year we are in Braunschweig. If anyone knows any other festivals that alternate between two cities, I would be very curious to hear about them, because it's quite unusual. It certainly presents some unique challenges, and so far, I haven't encountered anyone else running a similar concept.

The festival is an international festival of the performing arts, lasting over two weeks, and it focuses on experimental forms of theatre. We explore the different shapes that theatre can take, but we also work with a broader understanding of what performing arts can be.

I think, probably similar to Tomasz, I am very interested in how to transform institutional structures—how we, as a team, can work on this and what kind of values we embody in doing so. I am also personally interested in challenging my own role as the sole curator of the festival: thinking about how to open up the curation process to other perspectives, whether through editorial approaches or by incorporating programming from different viewpoints. But we can go deeper into that later.

EDOARDO LAZZARI: This conversational setting was imagined as an open space, where different voices, positions, and experiences can co-exist. The invitation is to intervene and to take the floor whenever it feels necessary, allowing the conversation to shift, expand or change direction along the way.

From this starting point, I would like to propose a set of questions that emerge from my own research but are intended to resonate beyond it, exploring what curating can do when it is not understood merely as exhibition-making, but also as a form of assembly: convening and creating fragile and situated spaces for attention, dis-

agreement, and perhaps even cohabitation. In this sense, the question is also how the visual and performing arts might offer tools to imagine curatorial formats that are not only representative, but capable of transformation.

Unfinished Business was chosen as the title of this conversation because the debate around curating the performing arts in Italy is still relatively recent and perhaps has not yet found full articulation as a shared field of discussion. Together with Piersandra, I recently edited a publication titled *Performance + Curatela*—the students here already know it well.¹ Published in 2021, the book brings together a collection of diverse essays: some translated into Italian for the occasion, and others written by Italian authors specifically for the project.

Starting from that publication, I tried to identify a few thematic lines that could help structure today's exchange. The excerpts I will occasionally bring in—from *Performance + Curatela* as well as other references—are meant as prompts: devices to activate a shared space of reaction and support collective thinking. In this sense, *Unfinished Business* names a condition: an open field of inquiry where doubts, intuitions and speculative desires can circulate. It is within this field that curating can be approached as a political and sensitive practice—one that remains attentive to what is still unresolved and to what requires collective care.

One of the first lines I would like to introduce concerns institution-ization. What interests me here is how curating's capacity to reinvent institutions often unfolds along a fragile line—imagination—at work in forming new environments that connect diverse entities that sometimes can also crystallize into stable geometries, protocols, routines, and forms of control. Under pressure, institutions are frequently compelled to produce evidence of their political and social value in order to counter looming threats such as budget cuts and reforms. In doing

so, they may end up becoming “good and obedient” cultural agents. To open this tension rather than resolve it, I would like to bring in two voices whom many of us already work with.

Bojana Kunst, theorist and dramaturge, writes, “The institution is not somewhere else. It is not the enemy. It is the very place where we stand, and it is always in the making, always open to acts of institution and acts of de-institution.”²

And Irit Rogoff, in *Curating and the Educational Turn*, proposes a related shift in perspective: “Born of a belief that the institutions we inhabit can potentially be so much more than they are, these questions ask how the museum, the university, the art school, can surpass their current functions.”³

Starting from these propositions, and considering the diversity of curatorial approaches present here today, the invitation is to think together about how specific projects and case studies might react to, or intervene in, these forms of instituted reality. How do our formats, in their own way, institute—or re-institute—reality?

ANNA MÜLTER: I think the notion of the institution as the enemy is important to put on the table, because in my experience, artists often see institutions as something they need to fight against, something that is not on their side. Of course, these tensions are real. Even small institutions, like festivals, experience them, if differently. We are a rather small entity, but we are part of a huge institution—the German State Theatre—which has thousands of employees, and where change happens very slowly. However, as a festival, we are actually independent in terms of team, programme, and finances. We use the state's resources during the festival, but otherwise, we are a flexible institution.

1 Piersandra Di Matteo (ed.), *Performance + Curatela* (Bologna: Luca Sossella Editore, 2021).

2 Bojana Kunst, “On Institutions”, *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, vol. 23, no. 4–5, 2018, 91–94.

3 Irit Rogoff, “Turning”, in *Curating and the Educational Turn*, eds. Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (Amsterdam: De Appel and Open Editions), 23–31.

For me, it is crucial that the institution bends towards the artist. The institution should be there for the artists, but also, of course, for the public and the audience. An institution is also made up of the people who work within it. Therefore, we invest a lot of work on the team—how we work together internally, how we work with artists, and how we work with the public.

We organize workshops on discrimination and critical practices, aiming to raise awareness, particularly because we work with many artists from the Global South. As an institution located in the Global North, we are very aware of the power imbalances that exist. We also do a lot of work around accessibility and anti-ableism: all team members, even those who are with us temporarily, are given training on this. Even the State Theatre staff—from audience managers to box office workers—participate in these workshops, so that we can become a more welcoming institution.

PIERSANDRA DI MATTEO: I would like to highlight two main points. First, what interests me, when thinking of the festival as an institution, is its potential to operate in a trans-institutional dimension. This means creating collaborations not only with major art institutions—and not merely appropriating their resources—but also with social associations and grassroots organizations, building a web of connections distributed across the city. In the specific case of the Short Theatre festival, in a big city like Rome, its strength lies precisely in putting together a *sympoiesis* of collaborations. This network enables the redistribution and re-configuration of institutional power, fostering new forms of relationships among diverse actors across the urban landscape and engaging the city's very morphology—its symbolic, mnemonic and spatial conditions—as active agents within these relational dynamics.

The second point I would like to stress is the notion that “institutions are not the enemy”—a concept that is, in my view, crucial but also ambiguous. Some institutions certainly *are* the enemy. However, I strongly believe that we should not simply oppose institutions;

rather, we should try to enter them and transform them from within. I believe in this possibility.

At the same time, looking at the current situation in Italy, it is clear that the major theatrical institutions are not opening any real dialogue with those of us who are trying to rethink and reprocess curatorial practices within the performing arts. These national institutions are still largely led by white figures with a very outdated conception of the theatre. Any potential for transformation remains largely theoretical; in practical terms, such institutions consolidate conservative logics.

Moreover, although they sometimes use a certain language or format to legitimize their practices, they rarely implement concrete actions to produce, sustain or nurture the future of the performing arts field. In this sense, the situation is quite tricky and demands careful and strategic engagement.

In her reflections on artistic institutions, Bojana Kunst invites us to think of the institution as something other than a sedimented form. Rather, as a process in a constant state of institutionalization—a living matter shaped by relations, working conditions, temporalities, and modes of presence. Hers is an invitation to keep the institution porous—what she calls *nebulous*—traversed by forces that continually transform it, enabling it to remain unfinished and renegotiable. Not a definitive architecture, but a field of forces in ongoing tension. From this perspective, the institution becomes a space where thought takes shape as practice, and where practice generates shared forms of life. In this sense, the institution can itself be a critical practice.

TOMASZ KIREŃCZUK: For me, when thinking about institutions, I always start from the point of accepting that institutions exist. And I find it very helpful to say: yes, institutions exist—and because they exist, we can do something with them.

Of course, it depends on each specific case. I agree with Piersandra that today many institutions support very conservative movements. But the important question for me is: what can we do with institu-

tions? How can we inject life into them? I think it's crucial to ask: who do the institutions work for? Unfortunately, inside many institutions today, this question is no longer broached.

Many institutions exist simply to perpetuate themselves and their power. There's a way of thinking that says: "We shouldn't do this because it's risky," "We shouldn't support that artist or movement because it might cause conflicts with political power." This, I believe, is a mistake.

When I think about institutions in relation to my curatorial practice—both at Santarcangelo and in my previous experiences—for me, every institution is just a *tool*. Nothing more. It doesn't matter if it's big or small, powerful or poor: an institution is always just a tool to support movements, to support social and cultural progression. Of course, we should also try to take the lead in institutions and use them to bring about change—but always seeing them as means, not as ends in themselves. Sometimes we will succeed, sometimes we won't, because obviously there's a lot of backlash happening everywhere.

I just wanted to share with you a past experience that I learned a lot from. I was curating the Dialog Festival in Wrocław during the Law and Justice-led government in Poland—a government that was, more or less, similar to Meloni's, but maybe even more extreme, especially in the cultural sector. The festival was run by the city office—a powerful and wealthy city institution—but I had an independent position inside it. At a certain point, we were blackmailed by the Ministry of Culture because of the presence of certain artists in the programme. They told us, in not so many words, "Either you cancel this performance, or we will cancel the funding," and it was a lot of money, very close to the festival dates, leaving very little room to find solutions.

For me and for the team, it was clear that we could not accept this blackmail. However, the pressure was not only coming from the ministry but even more strongly from within the institution itself. I remember a dialogue I had with the institution's director: he told me that by refusing to cancel the performance, we were acting against the institution, because it would cause problems. But I replied: "No, what we are doing

is for the institution. Because now is precisely the moment we can prove that this kind of institution is necessary. This is the moment when we can take a position and show what an institution can stand for."

Of course, this decision brought many problems: financial cuts, limitations on our work, and many consequences not just for the institution but for the people working within it. Still, I believe that if we think institutions can continue to play an important role in our society, then these kinds of decisions must be taken. Ultimately, it's about how we share power: about decision-making and responsibility, and about using institutions even in politically complicated and risky situations.

IRENE CALDERONI: Well, there's a lot to say, of course. But I would start with a general reflection: my experience and my thinking on this topic come from the fact that working within an institution always puts you in—let's say—an uneasy position. On the one hand, you are part of the institution; on the other hand, you often aim to represent the rights and needs of others—the artists you invite, the communities you engage with, people from different positions and backgrounds.

This in-between position is one of constant unease, and it happens at every level—whether you are an assistant curator, a curator or a director. It keeps on appearing. Because on one side there is your profession, your professional ethics, your project—the discourse and tools you are trying to build and use as a curator and intellectual. And then, there is the reality of the institution—an organization embedded in political, social and economic contexts, with its own aims and agendas. An institution is always a mix of different agendas—of the government, private owners, sponsors, and many other actors.

I say this because there is often an idealized notion of the curator as someone who simultaneously offers perfect support to artists while transforming the institution, creating some kind of "ideal world." But the reality is more complex: there is a constant negotiation between wanting to say, "Of course, we will do whatever you want," and dealing with institutional constraints—which are often

about money, but not only. You find yourself struggling: you want to change the institution, you want to support the institution, and you want to support the artists—all at the same time. For me, this position has always been very important to reflect on, and if you look into curatorial history, you find many examples and stories that show this tension.

At the same time, we also have to rethink and rewrite the idealized narrative of the relationship between curators and artists, which is not always harmonious—sometimes, conflicts emerge (not in this case, but it can happen.)

The second point I would like to bring up is related to my current curatorial project—the one that is hosting us now—and to my previous experiences. In my former position at another private foundation, I was curating exhibitions and co-tutoring an educational programme, called Campo, in Turin. That experience was extremely meaningful for me because it allowed me—and my colleagues—to understand the radical potential of embedding educational and professional training projects within an institutional context.

At first glance, this might sound counterintuitive. Education itself is a powerful institution—one of the first disciplinary structures in society. And yet, the idea that an art institution can create a space to learn “how to do things with art” can be radical in its own right. If we think about the genealogy of curatorial programmes, we can see that many of them emerged from reflection on education and institutional critique. One of the earliest and most significant examples is the Whitney Independent Study Program, which started in 1967. Hosted by one of the most important museums in the USA, it was an educational project deeply rooted in the practices of institutional critique. It proves that it is possible to embed pedagogy—critical pedagogy at that—within the very “belly” of the institution.

In short, many of the reflections we are discussing today were born precisely from this historical attempt: to rethink education and curatorship as powerful tools for institutional reflection and transformation.

QUESTION: I never really understood how far an artistic director can actually shape an entire festival. Of course, you have a certain set of possibilities you can work with when planning the next edition.

But I wonder, how much freedom do you really have to make changes? Can you actually revolutionize the institution, or would doing so risk losing funding? I’m asking in a very pragmatic sense.

TOMASZ KIREŃCZUK: Well, you know, if there is no money in a festival, you’re not so worried about losing it—because there was nothing much to begin with. That’s the case with Short Theatre, and it’s not so different with Santarcangelo either. But aside from those examples, I would say, when you start, you usually have a certain amount of money already secured and your task is to decide how to use it. The first edition often gives you the greatest freedom, because no one knows you yet, no one knows what you will do—so you have a little room for manoeuvre. Of course, resources are limited, but you have the chance to set a direction.

It’s difficult to give a general answer because every case is different. Speaking about Santarcangelo specifically, I must say—and I say this with real pleasure—that as a curator I have had complete freedom in deciding what I want to do, within the limited tools and resources we have. In three years, I have never experienced political pressure from the board or from the institutional side.

Of course, there are economic limits. We could even talk about economic censorship—why are progressive festivals always expected to survive with so few resources?—but that’s another question.

Still, Santarcangelo is a very specific case. Historically, the festival has always supported progressive movements and valued curatorial freedom. I remember my first meeting with the board after being appointed: they told me, “You won’t have a lot of money, but you’ll have a lot of freedom.” At first, I thought it was just a slogan—but I quickly realized it was true. Of course, it’s still your responsibility what you do with that freedom. It doesn’t mean that everyone—starting with the town council, and others too—loves everything we programme.

But there is real acceptance, you are appointed because they trust you to make decisions.

About the idea of “making a revolution”—I think it’s a personal matter. When I came to Santarcangelo, I didn’t feel that a revolution was needed. The festival itself was already a powerful tool. Naturally, every curator will bring changes to the programming, but I felt deeply connected to the festival’s history and spirit. What mattered to me was improving the quality of work for everyone connected to the festival—the artists, the collaborators, the community. That’s why we started working on additional special projects: to find more funding, create more opportunities, and offer more support. With the basic budget, it’s almost impossible to run the festival properly, so we had to think creatively about how to extend support beyond the festival dates.

For example, we developed annual activities not directly tied to the festival’s production logic. We decided that if we offer an artist a residency in Santarcangelo, it doesn’t necessarily mean they have to present something at the festival. We wanted to avoid a purely transactional logic—investing in artists only if they produce immediate results. Now, after three years, we have artists living in the guest rooms above our offices all year round. Some of them end up in the festival, some don’t—and that’s fine. What matters is that we are sharing resources, building daily relationships and staying close to artistic processes. These small changes, I believe, create more sensitivity, open new questions and enrich our ecosystem.

So, in the case of Santarcangelo, I didn’t feel the need for a revolution. Rather, it was about preserving and caring for what was already powerful, and adding something—new tools, new collaborations—in a very personal, gradual way. I hope this answers your question.

QUESTION: I would like to expand this question a bit. When it comes to festival curators or artistic directors, is there usually a minimum number of shows that you are expected to present? Are there pressures to reach a certain quantity of productions or events? And

how do you manage these expectations, especially in relation to limited resources and the need to represent different cultures and perspectives within the programme?

ANNA MÜLTER: I think there are many different models, depending on each festival, and local context. And also depending on the country... Going back to your first question, I would also recommend looking very carefully—especially if you are considering taking one of these positions—at what the role of “artistic director” actually entails. It can mean very different things. Are you both the artistic director *and* the managing director? Or is there a separate managing director? What is the relationship between the two roles? Are you on an equal level, or is one position hierarchically above the other?

The way this power dynamic is organized leads to very different experiences inside the institution, and it has a big impact on what your role as artistic director can be. I would always recommend making sure you are either on the same level as the managing director or, ideally, that the artistic director is positioned above. Never accept a position where the managing director is above you—it will severely limit your ability to curate and lead. Also, I would advise looking carefully at the recent history of the festival—at how decisions have been made, at what kind of festival it has been and what the expectations are.

Regarding your question about the number of performances: in some festivals, especially the larger ones, there are very clear contractual obligations about how many performances you have to deliver.

You often have targets you are expected to meet, in terms of quantity. This is very specific to each context and each festival.

PIERSANDRA DI MATTEO: In the case of Short Theatre, the number of shows is actually regulated by the ministry. In our case, we were required to present 27 different companies, within the duration of the festival. How many days? It depends, usually between 10 days and two weeks.

The amount of funding we receive is linked to the specific cluster we belong to. We are categorized as a multidisciplinary festival with a focus on theatre—even though, in reality, our programme goes beyond just theatre. In addition to the number of companies, we were also required to present two or three co-productions, even though Short Theatre is not primarily a production festival. So we had to invent a system to meet that requirement. Moreover, we had to present six or seven premieres.

EDOARDO LAZZARI: I would now like to introduce a second line of discussion. To do so, I will briefly draw on a set of references that have accompanied many curatorial reflections over the past decade, and that still seem particularly relevant today.

One of them is the text *Festival as Thinking Entities*, a conversation curated by Silvia Bottirolì—former director of the Santarcangelo Festival—in which five curators were invited to reflect on the festival not simply as an event, but as a thinking institution.⁴ What interests me in returning to that conversation today is a question of latency, how these reflections resonate almost ten years later, and what may have shifted—or remained unresolved—since then.

Within that exchange, several positions emerged around the relationship between festivals and form. Berno Odo Polzer, for instance, described festivals as “the proposition of a certain form,” while expressing a desire to work towards the creation of an unstructured time. Livia Andrea Piazza, working in University of Giessen, questioned the very temporality of festivals, asking whether it is not anachronistic in itself, since “the time of the new is always in the meantime.” From yet another perspective, Blanga Gubbay, now the director of the

⁴ Judith Blackenberg, Daniel Blanga Gubbay, Silvia Bottirolì, Livia Andrea Piazza, Berno Odo Polzer, *How to Build a Manifesto for the Future of a Festival: “Festivals as Thinking Entities”, a Conversation*, in *Curating Live Arts: Critical Perspectives, Essays, and Conversations on Theory and Practice*, ed. Dena Davida, Marc Pronovost, Veronique Hudon, and Jane Gabriels (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018), 329.

Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels, framed festivals explicitly as formats, posing the question of what kind of answers such “empty forms” can actually provide.

Across these different positions, festivals emerge less as containers for works and more as sites in which reality is actively constructed through imagination—spaces where linear time can be suspended in order to inhabit the realm of the possible. A related concern appears in several issues of *On Curating*, which caution against the festival format crystallising into a fixed and normative model. Instead, they propose that artistic practices might generate zones of duration, waiting, and deferral—articulating what is described as a politics of slow time that resists the logics of constant acceleration and productivity.⁵

These provocations give rise to a series of questions. How might a festival deactivate the logic of strict scheduling and instead generate forms of duration, thresholds and lingering? Is it possible to conceive of a festival format that is not primarily oriented towards presentation, but towards coexistence—a sense of “not-yetness” and possibility? And in what ways could minor—discontinuous, non-performative, delayed—temporalities operate not as by-products, but as curatorial methods in their own right?

Ultimately, these questions also point towards a broader concern: how can we begin to subvert a festival format that increasingly feels crystallized, almost pre-scripted? Today, when we think of a festival, it often seems that a pre-determined image immediately comes to mind.

TOMASZ KIREŃCZUK: I just wanted to quickly go back to what Piersandra said earlier, and also to your question, because I have to say that speaking about the Italian subsidy system is actually one of my big hobbies.

⁵ In particular, these concerns are addressed in issues devoted to the relationship between curating and time, such as *Issue 24: After the Turn: Art Education Beyond the Museum* (2013), *Issue 36: Could Curating Be in Time?* (2018), and *Issue 39: Notes on Curating* (2019).

I think the question about numbers is a very funny one. If you gathered many festival directors in Italy and asked them how many performances they are supposed to present for the ministry, you would get a different answer from each of them—because no one really knows. There's this "mystic algorithm" that decides funding. Some say you need between 120 and 140 performances; others say 160. Then there's the question of the number of companies: should it be 25? 27? 30? 35? It's unclear—and it depends on the overall numbers in the system, which is crazy, because in the end, you really don't know what is expected from you. Now, personally, I'm not that interested in what is expected of me—but as a concept, it's quite insane.

Another thing I found shocking was when we submitted our first application to the ministry. I had only been in Italy for four months at that time, and when I saw this 5,000-page application, I thought, "Where is the section where you ask for an actual amount of money?" But there isn't one. You don't request an amount—the algorithm decides it for you. It's absurd. Honestly, I think it's one of the most violent and unpredictable subsidy systems in Europe. It's extremely difficult to work with. And yet, even if you think the system is stupid, violent and opaque, you are still inside it. You need the funding, so you have to find ways to survive within it.

When I started to study the financial situation of the festival, I quickly realized that it was very complicated. For me, it became clear that maintaining an international level at the festival was crucial—not just for Santarcangelo, but for the local scene as well. Festivals like these and others that are internationally connected create important opportunities for encounters between different movements and different ways of thinking. But, of course, with the money you have—or rather, don't have—it's almost impossible to achieve this alone. That's why we now rely heavily on bringing in funding from abroad to support the international part of the festival. Especially when it comes to artists from wealthier countries—they need to find funding from their own national sources. This approach allows us to free up resources to

support artists from less wealthy countries or from contexts where they receive little or no support.

It's a complicated puzzle, and it involves making difficult and sometimes unpleasant decisions.

For example, if I want to invite an artist from Switzerland, I have to ensure we can secure funding from Switzerland—because otherwise, it simply wouldn't be sustainable. It's not about being unfair—it's about a shared logic: those who have more resources should help support those who have fewer. In our case at Santarcangelo, we have been lucky so far. The festival has a strong international reputation, and many curators and professionals visit, which makes it attractive for funding bodies that support international mobility. It's not a perfect situation—but it's the set of cards we have to play with. And we do it in order to build something better and to expand what we are able to offer.

Now, to answer more directly the second part of your question, Edoardo: I personally like to think of a festival not as an event, but as an experience. That's very important to me. Sure, we have to deal with numbers—they are part of the reality—but for me, what truly matters is what we create and share. What kind of encounters are we able to produce? It's not about being the biggest, the first or the most successful. It's about what kinds of experiences we offer to audiences and artists alike. For me, it's less important whether someone likes or dislikes a particular performance. What matters is that going to the festival—whether watching a performance or just being there—gives you something: a question, a thought, a new encounter. Festivals should be places of encounter, places where you can step outside your everyday life for a moment and immerse yourself in artistic processes and proposals. They should be places where you stop the usual rhythm of doing things and experience something else—something transformative, even if just for a short time. So for me, thinking of festivals as *experience* rather than *events* helps us shift away from a logic based purely on production, numbers and success.

IRENE CALDERONI: I would still like to add something—or maybe ask something—because, based on my experience, I find it easier to connect the idea of creating a festival to the idea of curating an exhibition, rather than think of festivals as institutional structures comparable to museums or art centres.

This is mainly because of the time dimension. A festival condenses time in an intense way, much like an exhibition does—it is a unit of time and meaning framed within the broader programming of an institution. Also, as was mentioned earlier, there is this idea—even etymologically—of the festival as an exceptional time, something that breaks from the continuity of ordinary time.

However—and this is the point I want to add—it is very relevant today that museums and art spaces are also increasingly adopting this notion of “exceptional time” and moving beyond the traditional logic of the exhibition space. Many museums are now programming performative events that blur the lines between the exhibition format and the temporality of performance and the live arts.

This raises a crucial question, how can we think about convergence between the museum logic and the performing arts logic, and how does the festival idea fit into this hybrid space? And there is another related question: today, we are also seeing museums and art institutions not just programming performing arts, but actually adopting the *festival format* itself—integrating it into their own programming. This phenomenon is interesting because it is not simply the festival as an independent institution; it is an institution appropriating the festival *format* and inserting it into its own structural logic. Perhaps this trend reflects a broader tendency to play with condensed temporality and exceptionality—emphasizing certain moments in the programme as special, distinctive or even extraordinary. It’s not only about adding performance to the programme; it’s about creating an event *within* the institution that marks an accent, a rupture or a moment of intensified attention. I think these are important dynamics that are worth reflecting on.

EDOARDO LAZZARI: When we speak about institutions, festivals and formats, a crucial point—already mentioned by Anna—is accessibility. I would like to approach this not simply as a set of technical requirements or accommodations, but as an epistemic principle: something that shapes the very way we imagine, create and organize cultural spaces and practices. From this perspective, accessibility is not an element that can be added at a later stage; it intervenes at the level of how a space is conceived, whom it implicitly addresses, and which bodies, temporalities and forms of participation it takes for granted. In other words, access is not only about removing barriers, but about rethinking the conditions under which relations, encounters and forms of knowledge become possible.

Several authors have articulated this shift in particularly useful ways. One formulation suggests understanding curatorial practice as the creation of a space in which anyone might feel able to generate or transform what happens within it according to their own desires, while accepting the opacities that emerge in relations and valuing the space itself as an agonistic arena. In a related but more explicit political direction, Carmen Papalia’s *Open Access* manifesto reframes access as a practice grounded in mutual aid and consent, aimed at creating conditions in which all of us can thrive, rather than merely survive.⁶

Finally, this argument is pushed further in the context of *Crippling the Arts*, where Eliza Chandler frames access as a form of resistance rather than accommodation. Drawing on the work of artists such as Vanessa Dion Fletcher, Chandler describes access not as a compensatory gesture, but as a strategy for refusing normative modes of participation and the assumptions they carry. In this perspective, disability-led practices function as critical interventions that unsettle institutional expectations from within. Taken together, these positions invite us to consider accessibility not as a matter of compliance, but as a critical

6 Carmen Papalia, “An Accessibility Manifesto for the Arts”, *Canadian Art*, 2 Jan. 2018. <https://canadianart.ca/essays/access-revived/>.

and generative force, capable of reshaping curatorial formats, institutional structures, and the politics of participation itself.⁷

DIANA ANSELMO: I would like to start answering this big question about accessibility by telling you a short story—sorry, but I really love anecdotes.

So, once upon a time, when I was in high school—maybe ten years ago—we studied Pirandello, a famous Italian playwright. We specifically worked on *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (Six Characters in Search of an Author). I bought the book, read it and found it amazing. I thought, “Wow, such an incredible story!” Later, I discovered that the Teatro Stabile di Verona—not the main theatre, but one of the most important ones in my city—was staging *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*. I was very excited because, being deaf, I thought, “Since I know the story, I might be able to follow the performance even if I miss some things.” I was 16. I went to the theatre box office and asked for a ticket. The lady told me the price, and I said, “Perfect, just one little thing—I’m deaf, so I think I’m entitled to a reduced price.” She replied, “Of course! Just show me your documentation.” I showed her my papers, and she confirmed the reduced ticket. Then I asked, “Could I maybe have a seat closer to the stage? Not the first row, but the second maybe? Because it would really help me to follow better.” She said, “Oh no, no, no. With the reduced ticket, you have to sit in the disabled seating.” Curious, I asked, “Where is that?” She replied, “At the very back of the theatre.” I was shocked. She explained, “It’s not discrimination—it’s for safety reasons. In case of an emergency, wheelchair users need quick access to the exits.” I said, “I understand, but I’m not in a wheelchair. I just need to sit closer so I can follow the performance better.” But she insisted: the reduced-price ticket only allowed me to sit in the wheelchair-accessible area—which, by the way,

wasn’t even a seat, just an empty space. I tried to explain again, but she told me, “If you want a better seat, you have to buy a full-price ticket.” It was expensive, and honestly, I didn’t want to spend so much money on a show I wasn’t even sure I could fully follow. So, in the end, I decided not to go. What’s the point of this story?

Besides saying something about the “quality” of the Teatro Stabile di Verona, it shows how the people running the theatre had a single, stereotyped image of a disabled person in their minds: a white, probably straight, Veronese man in a wheelchair—the most mainstream visual representation of disability. They built all their accessibility policies around this single image, completely overlooking other types of disabilities. And this brings me to the real point: accessibility is a multi-faceted topic. You have to think about different layers:

- The audience: How can they access the space? Are we talking about physical disabilities, sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, cognitive impairments?
- The artists: How can we adapt the space and working conditions for artists with disabilities?
- The workers backstage: Why have I almost never seen disabled workers in theatres—not just at special inclusive events, but as regular parts of institutions?

Accessibility is not just about installing ramps or offering discounted tickets because you want to be “nice.” It’s not about winning a gold medal for being inclusive. The crucial shift is recognizing that accessibility must be a primary tool for dismantling ableism. Ableism is a power structure rooted in the idea that able-bodiedness—usually coded as white, straight, normative—is superior. This belief is at the root of many other forms of oppression.

So, dismantling ableism means dismantling this entire hierarchy of bodies—whether regarding ability, race, gender or anything else. What do I do with this awareness? Besides being a performer, I work directly in the field of accessibility. I founded an association called Al.Di.Qua. Artists, where we advocate for accessibility in the live arts and perfor-

7 Eliza Chandler, “Crippling the Arts in Canada”, *Canadian Theatre Review*, n. 176 (2018), 18–21.

mance. We collaborate with festivals—including the festival directed by Piersandra here at the table—to help make performances accessible. This is not about building ramps (just to be clear, me, I do not install ramps myself!), but about thinking critically about how to adapt performances for deaf, blind or otherwise disabled audiences. Sometimes festivals ask us to provide accessibility tools. Sometimes individual artists approach us saying, “I created this performance—can you help me make it accessible?” In these cases, we work together to integrate accessibility not just as a technical adjustment, but as a dramaturgical element, reshaping the performance itself.

Whose responsibility is it to ensure accessibility? Is it the artist’s? Is it the institution’s? In reality, it should be everyone’s responsibility.

Currently, I’m also curating a call for a residency programme—the first in Italy specifically aimed at deaf and disabled cultural workers, performers, and artists—with BASE Milano. The call closes in one month.

In addition, I am curating a festival called *Repubblica Sorda*, which will take place in Rome in November. It will feature shows entirely in Italian Sign Language (LIS), created either by adapting existing works (for example, Shakespeare or Pirandello) or by developing original pieces directly in sign language.

Now I face an ironic new challenge: making these sign language performances accessible for hearing audiences—through written translations, interpreters, and other tools. This requires a lot of resources, but it’s essential if we want to create genuinely open spaces. And speaking of inspiring examples, last year, at a festival directed by Anna Mülter—a pioneer in these practices—I performed a show that included spoken Italian and Italian Sign Language with German Sign Language interpretation. What was revolutionary was the use of a deaf interpreter, not a hearing one, creating a much more natural, fluid translation. This is something we are still struggling to implement in Italy.

My next performance will be entirely in Italian Sign Language, performed with Daniel (some of you might have met him during a work-

shop here). It will involve a layered interpretation process: Italian Sign Language live on stage, simultaneous written German text, translation into German Sign Language—again using the “feeding” technique between a hearing and a deaf interpreter. The idea is also to make the audience see that there are many different sign languages across the world—not just “one” Sign Language.

And final fun fact: the German Sign Language interpreter for this project will be... my cousin!

(Every Italian has a German cousin, right? Thank you for laughing!) Thank you so much for listening.

ANNA MÜLTER: Yes, that’s exactly how we do it—but let me explain a bit more. I took over the festival four years ago. Before me, my colleague was in charge and she did amazing work, especially around postcolonial contexts. I come from a practice-based background and I brought that perspective into the festival when I started. The key to making accessibility work is to collaborate with disabled and deaf advisors. Accessibility is not something you can simply design “for” someone—it must be developed with the people concerned.

So we started working with a group of advisors, and over these four years, we have slowly built up the range of what we offer, because we want to ensure what we do is high quality. At the beginning, we introduced maybe two accessibility initiatives. Each year, we added one or two more. Now, we have a really broad and well-developed accessibility framework. But importantly, we also constantly evaluate what we do, always alongside our disabled and deaf advisors.

For example, in the second year, we realized that our way of doing language interpretation was still very traditional, very “old school.” So, while preparing an edition of the festival that had a specific focus on deaf artists—and when I say focus, I don’t mean just programming deaf artists, but truly engaging with them—we made substantial changes. That year, the entire festival centre was designed by a deaf

architect, following deaf space principles (and looking around here, I would say there's a lot of deaf space at this table too).

It was a really beautiful experience—when working in a deaf-designed space, communication feels more fluid: you can see people, greet each other easily and naturally engage in visual ways. At the same time, in Germany, a new deaf activist group called Deaf Performance Now was founded. They began campaigning for proper sign language interpretation in music and the performing arts. This movement emerged partly in reaction to a very popular hearing interpreter who was getting a lot of media attention—sometimes centring herself rather than the deaf community (according to interpreter ethics, a hearing interpreter should always centre the deaf community and never take the spotlight).

This context made it even clearer for us, we had to work directly with deaf artists, experts and advisors, and continue refining our approaches. For example, when we first started offering an audio description, we worked with a professional trained in the technique. But very soon we realized it was crucial to involve blind experts too—so we built a collaborative model, where seeing and blind experts work together, and blind users give feedback. There is always room for improvement.

And just one final comment on something very important that you mentioned, whose responsibility is accessibility? In my view, it is the responsibility of the cultural institution. Often, I hear artistic directors say, “Oh, we would like to do accessibility, but we don't have extra funding for that.” When I took over the festival, it was clear to me that we would dedicate a part of our existing budget to accessibility. Not as an “extra,” funding permitting—but as a structural commitment. Of course, it means that I show one or two fewer performances each year. And that's a choice I will always make. Because if we are a public cultural institution, then accessibility must be part of our core mission, not an optional addition.

PIERSANDRA DI MATTEO: When I became artistic director of Short Theatre, it was clear that accessibility had to be a core concern. At the same time, as a team, we quickly realized how limited our knowledge actually was.

Between 2022 and 2024, Short Theatre—together with the autumn project Fermento—translated these questions into concrete changes to our programming and working methods. We adopted an explicitly anti-ableist perspective, with particular attention to the relationship between acoustic performativity and sensory disabilities. Guided by members of the collective Al.Di.Qua. Artists, the festival team undertook structured training on accessibility which addressed both general frameworks and specific organization- and communication-related issues.

In parallel, we programmed performances and workshops led by disabled artists; developed audience-oriented actions for people with sensory disabilities, such as poetic audio descriptions for choreographic works; and promoted training seminars for cultural workers in collaboration with local institutions. As Diana has already noted, the core issue is to dislodge our assumptions about ability and efficiency—the idea that we already know how things should be organized. A key reference for me in this process was John Lee Clark's essay *Against Access*. Clark, a DeafBlind poet and essayist and a central figure in Protactile language and culture, reflects on the insistence of hearing and sighted people on “giving” access.⁸ He questions this gesture as a presumed condition for an “authentic” encounter with the world, exposing how deeply ableist its underlying assumptions are.

8 Protactile is a linguistic and relational system developed within DeafBlind communities in the United States from 2007 onward, particularly in Seattle. Rather than adapting existing visual modes of communication, Protactile is grounded in tactile channels, and in the shared use of the body as a communicative space. Incorporating elements of American Sign Language, it introduces specific principles such as contact space, tactile imagery, and reciprocity, positioning itself not only as a language but as a social and political practice that redefines the very conditions of communication and participation.

Following this long process of knowledge exchange, we decided to focus on two specific areas—deaf culture and blindness/visual impairment—and to develop concrete practices through direct engagement with the forms of knowledge emerging from these communities.

We came to understand that being an accessible institution is not simply a matter of providing tools for disabled spectators, but of reshaping our way of working. We didn't have an earmarked accessibility budget, so we applied for external funding and secured resources that allowed us to sustain this trajectory over three years. Among the actions we implemented: translating and voicing all website content; programming performances with audio description, often developed specifically for individual works; hosting artists with disability; and inventing new formats.

We also received support from the European Commission through Creative Europe for *Radio That Matters*, a project developed with partner festivals including Parallèle (Marseille), Baltic Circle (Helsinki), and Errant Sound (Berlin). Rather than applying accessibility tools to existing works, the project explored new creative formats in which the knowledge of blind and visually impaired people became integral to sound-based artistic creation.

Within this framework, the festival initiated a participatory project with composer and sound artist Alessandro Bosetti, involving members of the blind and visually impaired community of the Sant'Alessio Institute in Rome. Together, they co-developed mnemonic sound devices exploring language, memory, and the ephemeral affective nature of acoustic experience. This process led to the accessible performance *La memoria risiede nel lobo dell'orecchio* (Memory Resides in the Earlobe), which interweaves participants' sonic memories while implicitly addressing the relationship between sound and memory in the visually impaired experience.

Crucially, this work is not about isolated projects, but about long-term relationships with the Sant'Alessio Institute. Accessibility requires continuity: building trust, sustaining dialogue and embedding practices over time.

QUESTION: When performances are produced, they are usually created by the same type of people—predominantly white, often men, certainly able-bodied—and the audiences and communities that follow theatres and festivals tend to be composed of the same kind of people as well.

I always wonder what kind of impact performances can really have when they are programmed and presented within a context that is, structurally, often hostile to the kind of reflections we are discussing here.

Of course, without putting an excessive burden of responsibility on the performers and artists themselves, I keep asking myself, what is the risk that the institutional system ends up co-opting and neutralizing everything—so that even performances intended to be critical fail to structurally subvert the system they are presented within?

DIANA ANSELMO: I can offer two thoughts—not really answers—and of course I welcome my colleagues to add as well.

The first thought is a sociological one. Every time there's a crack in what people expect to see or experience—whether that's seeing a disabled performer, a trans body or anything else that challenges norms—something happens. Audience members might not just be confused; some might even feel scared or disgusted. But here's the point, even if they leave people feeling uncomfortable, confused or upset, something shifts in their perception. This isn't magic—it's sociological. A crack is opened, and suddenly, they are confronted with the idea that reality might be bigger, stranger and more complex than they previously thought. So I believe deeply in the transformative power of performance. Performance presents alternatives, other ways of imagining reality.

And the stage is a special space to do this, because, think about it: If a trans body, for example, undressed down to underwear on a public street, the police would intervene. You can't do that without permission; you would be fined or stopped. But on a stage, within the framework of performance, you can create experiences that would otherwise be forbidden or impossible in a public space. This makes performance spaces incredibly powerful sites for creating alternative realities.

The second thought relates to the issue of instrumentalization. I remember once, when I was a student, a teacher of ours—I can't recall who—made us read a text that said, "If you are doing something for someone without involving them, you are not doing it for them; you are doing it against them." That really stayed with me. So, one way to recognize whether a festival or institution is being truly supportive—or simply instrumentalizing—is to ask: Are they doing things *for* marginalized communities, or *with* them?

Another important distinction is, are they merely offering visibility to marginalized artists (gay, Black, disabled, deaf, etc.), or are they actively working to dismantle the very structures that oppress these communities?

Because it's easy to say, "Oh, I'm programming you because you're from Southern Italy," or "because you are queer," or whatever. But that's not enough. It's superficial if it doesn't address the structural inequalities.

Now, speaking personally, what do I do when I realize an institution is inviting me just because I fit their "perfect package"? Because yes, I'm not naïve, I know I can come across as an "easy" person for them to programme: I tick some diversity boxes, but I am also seen as accessible, "not too disruptive." In those cases, what I try to do is bring with me as many deaf and disabled artists as possible, using the resources they offer me. If they invite me, then I show up and say, "Thank you. By the way, I'm bringing another deaf performer, and they need an interpreter." In this way, I try to take advantage of the structures that might have tried to instrumentalize me, turning their tokenism into real opportunities for others.

TOMASZ KIREŃCZUK: If I can add something... Of course, there is a lot of tokenism happening in many institutions today, and it's definitely a big topic. Many artists are starting to question this—some even say, "No, I won't accept the invitation, because you are not really inviting me; you are inviting what you think I represent." And I think this is very important.

Of course, it's not easy for many artists to say no, because saying no can mean giving up money, visibility, opportunities. It's a complex decision. But speaking as a festival curator, I would say that a real answer to the risk of tokenism lies in the continuity of the work and in the depth of the festival or institution's commitment. It's about building real dialogue with the artists you work with.

I can share an example from Santarcangelo, when we started in 2022, we invited Ntando Cele—a South African artist and performer based in Switzerland, to present her piece *Go Go Othello*, a work in which she confronts her position as a Black performer in a predominantly white cultural environment. It's an incredibly powerful and beautiful performance, both artistically and politically. We presented it at the Teatro Petrella in Longiano, a small town near Santarcangelo. When we arrived there with Ntando, we realized she was the first Black performer ever to take the stage in that theatre, which has a history of over 200 years. That was shocking.

Later, I spoke with French performer and director Rébecca Chaillon and she told me she was the first Black woman to ever direct a production in one of Paris's major theatres. So this is not just a local, Italian problem, it's very widespread.

The performance by Ntando Cele was well received, if we can use that word although I don't particularly like it. Yet many people said afterwards, "It's a beautiful show, but it's not really connected to our reality." I thought: "How can you say that, when this is one of the most racist nations in Europe?" This reaction made me realize even more clearly that this is a topic we need to keep working on.

So, for me, it's not about ticking boxes: "Oh, we need a Palestinian artist, a Ukrainian artist, because the funders say so." It's about having a deep understanding where you are and what kind of work needs to be done, even if it's uncomfortable. A lot of institutions are now rushing to "find partners" in Ukraine, because European funding programmes award extra points for involving Ukrainian organizations, without necessarily asking whether those institutions, which are living through

a war, want or are able to collaborate. That's instrumentalization. But it doesn't have to be that way. You can create a wider context for your work—understanding that the interventions you make may not change everything immediately, but they can start something.

For instance, every year since 2022, we have brought a piece about racism to Longiano. It's not because we imposed it—it's because the space evolved through dialogue, presence and repetition.

Now Longiano might be one of the best-informed small towns in Italy on these topics! And change happens like that: slowly, through continuity. I can also say that when I arrived in 2022, I don't think there was even one Black person in the audience at Santarcangelo. I can't claim that now the audience is dramatically different, but there are slow, visible changes. And that matters.

Because if you say, "I don't have a Black audience, so I won't programme Black artists," you are just reinforcing the problem. You have to start—even if you don't see the audience change immediately. You have to build relationships over time.

Today, Santarcangelo is strongly supported by the queer community, but that only happened because of many years of collaboration between the festival and queer artists. It doesn't happen overnight. The same goes for race, disability and other dimensions. It's about continuity, patience and consistently standing by what you believe in.

ANNA MÜLTER: Yeah, and one question that I always find helpful for myself is this, when I look at a piece of work—because we are all, I think, operating in predominantly or massively white contexts in terms of audience—I ask myself, was this work created with only a white audience in mind, or was it created with different audiences in mind as well?" Asking yourself this question reveals a lot about the work you are looking at. Because there are many works about racism, for instance, that can actually be quite hurtful for Black audiences.

Early on in my time programming the festival, I set a rule for myself: I never programme a piece featuring disabled performers if it was creat-

ed by a non-disabled artist. It's not because I believe non-disabled artists should never work with disability—there are good practices out there.

But I want to create a shift—an economic and systemic shift. Because for institutions, it's often easier to invite a famous, non-disabled artist who suddenly decides to create an "inclusive" piece.

It's much harder, but much more necessary, to actually centre disabled artists and their authorship. Similarly, I don't usually—actually, I never—invite works about race that are created solely by white artists. It's also about asking, who is behind the creation? Who holds the authorship and the narrative authority?

IRENE CALDERONI: In terms of programming, there is definitely a process underway—and I would say things are getting better. For example, the next curator of the Biennale is an African woman. I think it shows that we are starting to see more and more art produced by people from diverse backgrounds being selected, programmed and presented. Historically, big curators were almost exclusively white European men. But that situation is beginning to change. There is now an emerging scene of young curators from other countries who are actively participating in this process and who are starting to take positions within institutions—in museums, in festivals, in cultural organizations. Of course, it's a gradual change. But it is happening, and that matters.

PIERSANDRA DI MATTEO: In theatre, it's not like that. We aren't seeing the same level of change.

IRENE CALDERONI: In museums, yes—leadership is starting to change. Museums are undergoing transformations, at least in terms of leadership, funding structures and broader conversations.

PIERSANDRA DI MATTEO: But in theatre, they are still very, very far from this. In Europe—no, I don't think real change has happened yet in theatre. And in Italy, even less so.

IRENE CALDERONI: Even in museums in Italy, I wouldn't say they are truly transformative yet—but at least there are some signs of change on an international level. For example, if we think about contexts like the Biennale, we've had curators from the Global South in recent editions, and that gives at least a reference point for imagining a broader process of institutional transformation. But in Italy specifically? No, we are still far from that.

EDOARDO LAZZARI: Thank you once again to everyone who shared reflections, questions, and doubts today. This encounter reinforces the sense that there is an urgent need to continue creating spaces for collective thinking, mutual support, and speculative imagination. We hope that what began here can remain open—unfinished—and continue to resonate, shift and unfold through each of our practices, in different ways and over time.