

STEFANIA:

Welcome to Artist Exchange\_Discussing Access, a series of podcasts created as part of the EDN Carte Blanche Artist Exchange\_ "What Makes You Disabled?" project, a project of Lavanderia a Vapore in Collegno and EDN European Dancehouse Network, in collaboration with AI.Di.Qua. Artists, the first Italian organisation that brings together live performing arts professionals with disabilities. Let me introduce myself: I am Stefania Di Paolo, a scholar and a disability activist. I am a white woman in my thirties, I have a thin face, green eyes, and I wear glasses with a golden and turquoise frame. Today I am wearing a black shirt with a pink and green floral pattern, and we are in the offices of Lavanderia a Vapore, surrounded by beautiful plants. Here with me is one of the artists who animated these intensive workshop days, during which a community of dancers, artists and curators came together to question and, above all, practise the theme of accessibility; so I welcome Elia Zeno Covolan, artist and visual illustrator. Hi Elia!

ELIA:

Hello, thank you, Stefania.

STEFANIA:

Thank you for being here. Would you like to introduce yourself?

ELIA:

Yes, I am Elia Zeno Covolan. I am a trans and non-binary person. I am neurodivergent, I have disabilities and chronic illnesses, and I position myself politically. That is why I verbalise it. I am wearing grey trousers, grey socks and grey shoes. I am wearing a greyish/brownish t-shirt with a cyberpunk drawing of an apocalyptic skull. I have a beard and hair, actually no, I have no hair, I am balding. I wear glasses with pinkish/purplish lenses. They are glasses for low vision, so I always have to wear them, even if they look like sunglasses. I look 20-25 years old, even though I am not: I am older... What else? Well, I am a person...

STEFANIA:

A beautiful person! I would like to clarify something first: the reason behind these podcasts. We imagined these podcasts as a self-managed space created by people with disabilities - I have an invisible disability - for the disability community, but obviously with the intention of opening up a dialogue as plural and intersectional as possible. It is a space we imagined in order to deepen the practices currently taking place at Lavanderia a Vapore, including the workshop where you are the protagonist and which you designed together with the AI.Di.Qua. Artists association, and above all to talk about accessibility from many points of view, bearing in mind the demands, often different and sometimes conflicting, found within the disability community.

So, you organised a workshop called *Time, space, communication: accessibility is a journey*, where you invited participants to ask themselves, starting from an empathy exercise, what are the problems and the challenges that people with disabilities face when they want to participate in cultural events. And you use a tool, a working method, called design thinking, which I found particularly interesting as a working method to talk about accessibility. So the first thing I'm curious to understand is: what is design thinking, and why do you suggest it as a practical tool for approaching the topic of accessibility, but above all as a design tool?

ELIA:

Yes. I have been working with cultural organisations for some time. With Ai.Di.Qua. Artists I am touring this workshop, which I naturally adapt to the contexts, but which focuses on graphic design. I mainly work with graphic design and accessibility to make people understand that accessibility is a journey, extremely varied and different depending on the audience, the target audience. I realised that with practical examples, people can better understand what changes to make, what kind of differences to consider or what tools to use. So I try to put them in the position and perspective of being cultural organisers. From that point of view, they are gradually creating a path that starts from being aware of how people leave the house - a physical path - until they reach the location. During the workshop, I gradually get them to work on the aspects to consider when dealing with logistics, organisation and communication. And at the end of the four or six hours, depending on the workshop, participants find themselves with practical tools they can use. The interesting aspect of design thinking is that it is a tool that is generally "only" used and applied in the field of design. The simplest area of use is the development of mobile apps, for example. The interesting part is the steps this framework teaches. Why is that? Because they allow people to realise that, in fact, when they do design, they only focus on two aspects. Design thinking tells you how to start thinking about the subject, how to inform yourself on the subject, how to gather as much experience as possible from different realities, and then how to create a mental map of the problems as you go along. After that step, one begins to concretise and understand how to unravel the complexity of what they are organising; only after these two steps – usually set aside – the design begins and is followed by implementation. That is, how I translate my idea into something practical and concrete. The last two steps are: once you have created the festival, the theatre event or the performance, you move on with feedback, which means that, first of all, you engage with the target community. For example, if you want to reach a neurodivergent audience, you have to call on neurodivergent people to give you feedback, which then allows you to create an accessible and inclusive product. Then, once you have finished all this, you draw the conclusions, realise where you went wrong, what needs to be improved, what needs to be implemented, and then you go back to the beginning of the process for the next show or the following year. So this is also a very interesting element of design thinking: it does not have a beginning and an end, but it is a continuous implementation.

STEFANIA:

Because, as you said today, also at the workshop, accessibility is a journey and a process. As a result, we must move away from the idea of accessibility as a goal to be achieved and instead approach it as a working method. You mentioned two fundamental elements: context analysis (and therefore understanding disability as well as accessibility as a contextual phenomenon, as you cannot have one solution that applies to everyone) and the issue of active involvement of disability communities, which is a fragile area at the moment because there is still a lot of work to be done in that direction. And yet, it is the essential element. So we should not just imagine the person or the community as the beneficiary of a service but as someone who can - together with you - build a reality.

ELIA:

Yes, handing down products and services from above without first checking with the people you want to involve...

STEFANIA:

...doesn't make sense! In relation to this point, the world of disability often speaks of "situated condition". We borrow this term from sociology to indicate how each person experiences their condition of disability in a very intersectional way and how they relate to their access conditions, which is an expression I prefer over "special needs".

STEFANIA AND ELIA:

Definitely!

STEFANIA:

And concerning neurodivergent people – and here again, let's remember that the world of neurodivergence covers a really wide spectrum, bringing together many different access conditions – what do you think are the basic access conditions that a cultural organisation should have in mind when dealing with accessibility for neurodivergent people?

ELIA:

I start from an embodied condition, I am a neurodivergent person. Thanks to this point of view, I began to question how I could impact organisational realities in order to implement structural changes. First and foremost, the fundamental element is education: without education – not a one-time, one-hour thing, but consistent and structured education – you cannot change things. So in my opinion, educating the staff – especially the roles with a high turnover – makes a difference; because it's true that some realities – for example, some festivals – have accessibility managers (which is very rare in Italy), but if you don't evaluate all the relevant aspects, including the whole production chain, the audience and the audience's access, accessibility might be lacking at many stages. So, above all, educating people. For example, I am thinking of someone who does an internship and thus enters a reality for six months: during that time there can clearly be problems, perhaps in transporting or accompanying a person from the foyer to the hall. Many mishaps can occur! So, in my opinion, education is crucial: an education that is specific but also a process. Another aspect to consider is complexity, the fact that neurodivergent people are a universe, a galaxy, a universe, which is more than a galaxy. It is therefore essential not to take anything for granted but to talk to the people concerned or to talk - if the people concerned cannot express themselves - with those who can enable them to do so. We should not assume that people have made an identity journey on this because everyone is at a specific point in their journey. If we must give some practical bullet points, I would first suggest using clear communication. Moving away from the extremely complex and abstract artistic language and giving practical information: where, when, how, why. It must be clearly stated, legible, and written in readable fonts. The information must reach people. In my opinion, there must be a space for decompression. Especially within large and chaotic events, there should be a place where one can take refuge, feel safe and decompress. It is also very important to educate the audience itself, because if the staff is educated, but the audience is not, then, yes, many mishaps can happen here too.

STEFANIA:

I would like to add two things: the matter of self-education; so, not thinking that only the hall staff should be trained, because that would mean limiting the participation of neurodivergent people as audience members but not as artists, curators, designers...

ELIA:

Absolutely!

STEFANIA:

And therefore, first of all, start with internal education. Second thing: education has to be recognised and should not be improvised.

ELIA:

Absolutely!

STEFANIA:

These are not paths that can be done "in bits and pieces", by going on the Internet and trying to figure out how to become accessible. Instead, we need to involve professionals like you, for example, who know what we are talking about and who can accompany the organisation along this path.

ELIA:

Absolutely, and above all, provide funding for this because many organisations usually reach out when everything is done and say: "Okay, now I have thought about accessibility, I want the festival to become accessible". It's impossible! Or, better, very little can be done. The real difference is made by a budget allocated in advance, carefully designed and reasoned. Providing time, space and resources for this process. In short, it is also an economic issue; which is not to say, however, that if you don't have the financial resources, you can't still find ways to develop accessibility.

STEFANIA:

Tomorrow, May 26, a symposium will be held right here at Lavanderia a Vapore, where institutions and policymakers will meet to try to create change together, also from the point of view of funding and costs that accessibility obviously entails. But before we say goodbye, I would like to address one last issue that is very important to me. You also represent the community of people with chronic illnesses, a reality often not immediately associated with accessibility issues, even though it is a very wide and extremely complex community that is heterogeneous in its demands and access conditions. A reality that is often, unfortunately, overlooked, especially in work dynamics. What does this mean? I experience this firsthand as someone who has a chronic illness. For example, what is the impact of a chronic illness on one's performativity (since we are in a performative context)? I would also like your feedback on this.

ELIA:

The impact is certainly massive. From a practical point of view, if we want to be concrete, we are within a system that wants and expects performativity at a very high level, where the body is put at the centre and the production is very fast, also due to funding. The practical application requires a very quick time frame, often also for the audience. The chronic illness that I have is, like many chronic illnesses, and you understand me very well, extremely variable in time and space. There are times when I am able to be, to "function", and other times when it is impossible for me. We are confined in our solitude in bed, and without a network of people, which we have built up from below, we cannot survive. And I see the difference in accessibility in this as well. We are proposing a change, and it is very difficult, we see institutions struggling to involve us. What I notice and hurts me is that there's a line between when you're a little bit better - and that little bit makes a difference in your ability to work, enjoy entertainment, have a network, hang out with friends, a network...

STEFANIA:

A social network!

ELIA:

Yes, there are times when we are below that line, when we cannot work, participate and therefore access certain spaces because the conditions that would allow us to do so do not exist. And in my opinion, one of the main aspects is definitely time, also because it is extremely linked to the capitalist system. So time, performance... We must then consider the condition of the body, a body that must be able to withstand sometimes extremely difficult movements. If you are someone who works in the arts, you have to go on tour, you have to take trains and buses. And it's all pressing. Then again, the lack of resources, economic support and access to services. In my opinion, it is crucial to educate on invisibility and also on the fact that we need to be put in a position where we can participate.

STEFANIA:

In my opinion, this can become a tool for reflection, for a radical transformation that goes beyond disability and chooses accessibility as the paradigm of more sustainable production.

ELIA:

Yes, totally!

STEFANIA:

We are out of time. Elia, thank you very much. It was great talking to you. I know that now you have workshops to run, so thank you. I thank Elia Zeno Covolan for his participation. I let you go to the workshop, and I will see you tomorrow for the symposium, where we will continue to talk about all this.

ELIA:

Thank you so much.

STEFANIA:

Welcome to Artist Exchange\_Discussing Access, a cycle of three video podcasts created to talk about what is happening these days at Lavanderia a Vapore in Collegno, which hosts the EDN Carte Blanche Artist Exchange\_ "What Makes You Disabled?" project, a project of Lavanderia a Vapore with EDN European Dancehouse Network, in collaboration with the association AI.Di.Qua. Artists, the first Italian association of artists with disabilities working in the performing arts. Let me introduce myself: I am Stefania Di Paolo. I will start with my visual presentation: I am a white woman in my thirties, I have brown hair, gold and turquoise glasses, and I am rather skinny; I am wearing a black shirt with an orange and green floral design, and I am surrounded by beautiful plants and the guest I am now going to introduce. I am joined by Marta Olivieri, whom I thank for being here, a performer and choreographer who at Carte Blanche proposed the workshop *Multiply perception*, realised at the invitation of the AI.Di.Qua. association. I would like to remind you, before getting into the conversation, that Carte Blanche is a collective residency that brought together a diverse community of artists, curators and producers who gathered to talk and, above all, to practice accessibility through three different workshops, one of which was led by Marta Olivieri. Welcome, Marta! Would you like to introduce yourself?

MARTA:

Hello everyone, I am Marta, I have light brown hair, fair skin and light-coloured eyes. I am wearing trousers with white stripes that are very '90s and a country-style shirt in brown tones. I am really happy with this invitation, thank you!

STEFANIA:

Thanks to you. Let's start with *Multiply perception*, a workshop that originated from an invitation from the AI.Di.Qua. association, actually emerging from a broader research project involving the artistic duo consisting of Camilla Guarino and Giuseppe Comuniello, both members of the association. But let's stay on the workshop: what is *Multiply perception*, what is happening these days and, above all, what has been the reaction you have observed from the diverse and intergenerational community inhabiting Lavanderia a Vapore these days?

MARTA:

The workshop was imagined starting from AI.Di.Qua.'s call, which involved me in this event, in this meeting, because, just as you anticipated, I have been working with Camilla and Giuseppe on an artistic process for the past few months. Our collaboration generated in them a desire to invite me, not as a researcher focusing specifically on audio description, which is the device we are creating, but as an author observing the creative and artistic possibilities of audio description as a tool. Camilla and Giuseppe have been working on this for years, and the convergence between performance and their practice has generated new research and a new creation, starting from an already existing device; therefore, in this specific workshop, I am sharing some of the practices we have gone through together during the residencies dedicated to this work. In this case, I tried to propose steps to the participants, starting with a small introduction on the type of work I had already created and moving on to all those practices we integrated that modified the work on the scene, the surrounding research and its accessibility. This is a fact that we are observing, in the sense that both I and the performers, who have been carrying out this research for some time, realised that another kind of gaze had also clarified to ourselves – from two different points of view – the nature of the work. In this workshop, I have tried to bring together all these steps to reach a specific aspect of the work, "perceptual

multiplication", which is what the participants are currently working on, namely, the overlapping of different points of view on what is happening on stage and its surroundings: the room, the spaces, the moods, the temperatures, the sounds. In short, an overlapping of voices that creates a polyphony of narrations, visualising storytelling as a creative tool, as another place for accessing the work.

STEFANIA:

This is a fundamental element. I met you on this occasion, whereas I already knew Camilla and Giuseppe. They could not be here today, but I could learn more about their practices and the innovative aspect of their work. In other words, the idea of rethinking audio description not as a service targeted at a category of people, namely the visually impaired and the sighted, but as a research tool that amplifies the perceptive possibilities of the blind and visually impaired and, in general, of the entire community, both performers and spectators.

MARTA:

Yes, it's another tool.

STEFANIA:

An additional tool. Your encounter was interesting because it happened – let us remember – on the one hand, thanks to the invitation of Spazio Kor in Asti, by Chiara Bersani and Giulia Traversi, who are reflecting a lot on the relationship between accessibility and performance, and on the other hand from a previous work of yours...

MARTA:

Yes, the work already existed.

STEFANIA:

And you made it available to this beautiful artistic encounter with Giuseppe and Camilla, from which a very exploratory residency was born, which then landed in Rome at Orbita Spellbound within the context of another national residency, which allowed you to pursue a collective reasoning that I know is still ongoing, evolving. So how has *Trespass* changed thanks to this encounter?

MARTA:

Well, it certainly multiplied its accessibility, generating another kind of relationship between the performer and the audio-description and between the audio-description and the performer. I prefer to say "narration" or talk about "language work" because we go a bit beyond the boundaries of audio description; it plays with language, it is a relationship, a dialogue established over a linguistic composition. So there is a double access: a composition of the body, of movement, and a composition of language, of speech, which becomes a description, but which can constantly oscillate between what I am seeing and what I would like to see. The boundary is very thin; it is not a pedantic description or a commentary. It is a tool from which a whole other research channel emerged, which is totally and fortunately aligned with the previous work. Clearly, if *Trespass* itself had already

manifested an impossibility of dialogue with the practice of description, it would have been pointless to force it; instead, at Spazio Kor, we noticed that exactly the same thing was happening on stage and in the description because it is an instantaneous creation, which the performers - Vera Borghini and Loredana Candito - also bring into play at that very moment. So, yeah, the creation of an instantaneous narrative and choreography. The issue was how to generate discourse, not only about the instant but also about the structural mechanisms of that process, which was an element that *Trespass* already possessed. How does this dialogue take place, also in relation to the surrounding space, the public, the places, the architecture? How could we open up the work even more, so that it could be accessed more easily by the public?

STEFANIA:

This is a subject I wanted to discuss with you. One of the aspects that really fascinated me as I took an active part in the workshop is precisely this: the necessary reflection on the relationship between accessibility and control, on how we are constantly choosing what to tell, what to observe, what is important for us to communicate, what is important for others, which are fundamental questions for accessibility. With respect to what you were saying, this opens up a new possibility: poetic audio description. Yesterday during the workshop, many people were saying: "All performances should have this kind of possibility for experimentation" because, in some way, it is an additional access point to the performance, not only for the performers on stage but also for the audience, that is somehow called upon to participate differently and also to make a choice.

MARTA:

It depends on the type of authorship behind the work and the kind of proposal. In my opinion, it depends on what kind of work and writing is chosen. In this situation, it was possible, and therefore this opening was easily created, but that's not always the case. Above all, there was a desire to work on narration, not verbally, but there is a will to create images, for example, in the costume change. This possibility was already present under the surface, it was simply revealed through the instrument of the word, thanks to Giuseppe and Camilla's view of the work, which is very authorial. There, too, there was a meeting of views and opinions, which enabled a different kind of generation. I can speak from my situated point of view, which is a meeting of two postures, of two different positions. For me, it was interesting to see how that method and that kind of research could dialogue well with the work. And I was lucky because the device, or rather the structure of the work, already allowed for that. And meeting them allowed it even more. So I visualise it and use it as one among many compositional tools. I felt I wanted to propose, to experiment, continue experiencing it and not let the experience end just at that moment when it happened, where we all observed its potential.

STEFANIA:

What about the shift this encounter produced in you as an artist and author?

MARTA:

Well, certainly some intentions that I had, that I saw in the work and that perhaps could not emerge, came out much more clearly, other notes and nuances... With the working ensemble, I could bring out what was already there in a much more clearly and then visualise it more clearly and convey it, because it evidently needed to be looked at from another perspective to be better seen. This multiplication of access clarified what already existed but could not be seen. Then you can decide



when you want to see it: what is already inside the work does not necessarily have to come out entirely. The possibility of seeing it more clearly also clarified my vision of the work, establishing more direct and easy access.

Commentato [RV1]: -

STEFANIA:

Generally, I believe that for an author to address the question of who can participate, who can experience...

MARTA:

Of course, but also with which perception I view the work. So the question is interesting because it amplifies the view from which one looks at the work. We are used to experiencing it through sight, but why not include all other perceptions too? It is precisely a perceptual shift, or rather an enlargement and a perceptual displacement. It is about perceptive layers.

STEFANIA:

Absolutely.

MARTA:

So this question is surely not only related to audio description but can also be applied to other cases.

STEFANIA:

Yes, let's make this point clear: audio description - as Giuseppe and Camilla often remind us - is only one accessibility option and can often also be unsuitable. This is what I really appreciate about the work: the emphasis on the fact that in Trespass's specific case, audio description was the right tool.

MARTA:

Yes, because it is close to the type of work they do, perhaps a different job requires a different method. However, in this case, we were very lucky because we came together with a similar idea of how to work. The invitation I make is to never underestimate the possible access points to work that I see or am used to seeing with my eyes and feeling with my skin and to amplify other perceptions to achieve greater clarity regarding the work or to enter into a different type of research subject. It really helped to move the gaze elsewhere, shift the perception, understand from where to observe in order to write and if that goes towards the work's aim.

STEFANIA:

All right Marta, thank you.

MARTA:

Thanks to you.

STEFANIA:

And keep up the great work!

MARTA:

Thank you so much.

STEFANIA:

Welcome to Artists Exchange\_Discussing Access, a series of video podcasts created as part of the EDN Carte Blanche Artist Exchange\_ "What Makes You Disabled?" project, realised by Lavanderia a Vapore in Collegno and EDN European Dancehouse Network, in collaboration with AI.Di.Qua. Artists, the first Italian organisation bringing together live performing arts professionals with disabilities. The Carte Blanche project invited a diverse community of artists, curators and producers to question and, above all, practice accessibility, not as a goal to achieve but as a field of artistic and cultural research and a working method. And it did so through three different workshops. We will now explore one of them, but first, let me introduce myself: I am Stefania Di Paolo. I am a curator, a scholar and a disability activist. I am a white woman in my thirties. I have very fair skin, turquoise and gold glasses, and I am wearing a pink, green and black shirt. Right now, we are in the offices of Lavanderia a Vapore. I am going to introduce the guests who are with me today and whom I would like to thank for deciding to participate: Daniel Bongiovanni, deaf artist and Italian sign language teacher; Nikita Lyman, performer; and Diana Anselmo, curator, performer, disability activist and member of the association AI.Di.Qua. Artists. Welcome! I would like to ask each of them to introduce themselves as they wish.

NIKITA:

You go first?

DIANA:

You go first.

NIKITA:

I'll start. This is my name sign: Nikita. I will briefly tell you what I look like: I will start with the eyes. I have eyes of two colours: they are green and yellow. It is a bit of a mix. I have round glasses and thick eyebrows. Right now, my hair is up, I am wearing earrings and several necklaces. I am wearing a shirt and a waistcoat. I really like waistcoats! I work as a cultural and linguistic mediator. I am also an artist, and I work in many contexts, to which I adapt according to the situation. Here I collaborated with other professionals, and it was a wonderful experience. I am very happy. Thank you!

DANIEL:

My name is Daniel. My most distinctive physical appearance is my hair, which has a very noticeable wave. I have light eyes. I am currently wearing a very basic blue jumper with long sleeves. I am 27 years old. I was born deaf, and I use sign language to communicate. I must say that sign language greatly influenced my identity and how I communicate, allowing me to progress in life and also in my work. In fact, I also work as a teacher of Italian Sign Language and am an activist within the deaf community. Art has always been fundamental for me since childhood. Art in all its forms: sculpture, painting, drawing and photography. I recently also started working in theatre, thanks to sign language. And I am developing a project in collaboration with Nikita and Diana. Thank you!

DIANA:

Thank you. I am Diana. I start with my physical appearance: I am very tiny, with dark and short curly hair. I have a nose piercing and an ear stretcher, I have several tattoos, and I am wearing a purple sweatshirt. I am wearing a necklace and a ring – it's not real gold, it's fake! I work as an activist to fight for the accessibility rights of people with disabilities. I am also a performer. I create my own performances and collaborate with other artists. They were great experiences. With Daniel and Nikita, we created a performance I directed. The three of us worked on communication through body language in a visual way. Here at Lavanderia a Vapore, I participate in this convention also as a curator. For example, the idea of the workshop was theirs, and I was in charge of managing it, its context and content. Al.Di.Qua. was also in charge of curating all podcast episodes.

STEFANIA:

The idea behind this space was precisely to create a place realised by a person with an invisible disability that could open a dialogue with the artists with and without disabilities who are inhabiting the spaces of Lavanderia a Vapore these days. So it was also a documentary and participatory work. And it is meant as a space to explore the issues, the challenges and the opportunities we encounter during these days. You proposed Eyes and hands, a workshop that acquaints a diverse community with deaf culture, and during which you introduced us not only to sign language, of which Italian sign language is an expression, but also to deaf art and how gestures and bodily expressiveness, which are so important in deaf culture, can become an artistic vehicle for research and self-determination. I would like to start by talking about the workshop. Why was it important to you to create this workshop within this cultural context focusing on dance and body languages? Is there anything you have observed during these days that has struck you or that generated questions? Who would like to answer?

NIKITA:

I have so many things to say, but I need to think about it for a moment to summarise everything.

DANIEL:

First of all, we need to send a message. There has always been a tendency at festivals - and especially in dance performances - to consider the body as an expressive whole, and rightly so; however, often, hands are used very little. There are many movements of the legs, bust and head, but the hands could also be used more. Hands have great potential, as do the eyes. As deaf people, we greatly value eye contact to communicate. We use our hands to exchange and produce content. As for the workshop's title, Eyes and hands, we wanted to show how to develop visual perception through the eyes and communication through the hands. And everyone actually uses their hands daily. And it is something we do unconsciously; we use them automatically. For example, when we drive, we hold the steering wheel without realising it. It's something we do automatically. We have to remove the steering wheel and focus on our hands because they are the ones doing that activity, with an aesthetically pleasing shape that can send a message. And that is precisely the aim of this workshop.

NIKITA:

I go back to this... When Lavanderia a Vapore decided to invite us, we felt extremely happy. We wanted to bring our point of view. The participants are often hearing people, and we want to stimulate their curiosity by working on empathy to make them understand that deaf culture and hearing culture are different, but we can build a bridge between them. I firmly believe that hearing people become aware of deafness when they see sign language being used to communicate. But it is as if there is a filter that does not allow them to see things well and in detail, leading them to generalise. We really wanted to focus on that by making the most of the workshop hours: we worked hard to bring our contribution, starting from our sign language, from our culture, with the primary goal of overcoming the prejudices that often accompany people and lead them to generalise, and showing how many nuances there are among deaf people. I hope we achieved this goal. The secondary objective was also to share our point of view on the use of hands, which are not just a support: for us deaf people, they are part of our culture and language. And there is great beauty in that. So we wished for this shift, this change of point of view in the participants, to see the hands not just as something secondary. We started with the expressive mode of an actual language, a sign language, which has its own vocabulary, grammar and words. Consequently, this very practical language caused us to reason, analyse, compare and work on visual expression. Hearing people might have thought that without knowing a sign language, they could not express themselves visually using their hands. But this is not the case,

and we have provided different strategies and activities to show people what they can do with their hands, even things they normally don't pay attention to. Hands can be put to good use, they are a beautiful tool, and in many cases, people working within the theatre or in the visual arts lack something because they do not pay much attention to the use of hands and their potential. Deaf people, also thanks also to their culture, are very sensitive to this topic and the various nuances it can take on. And so we decided to make our contribution by focusing on this theme with the workshop Eyes and hands.

STEFANIA:

One of the things I have found most interesting is the variety of possibilities that deaf culture has produced from the point of view of artistic languages. For example, in the workshop, you introduced us to deaf poetry, which requires knowledge of sign language, but there are also freer forms of gestural expression, such as visual signing, which you have described as an art form that is accessible also to non-signing people. I find it very interesting how art forms are, first and foremost, a tool of recognition for the deaf community, aimed at the deaf and signing public. But there is also a strong desire to be open to everyone who wants to learn about deaf culture and deaf art. Diana, I don't know if you want to add anything.

DIANA:

Yes, thank you. Art is necessarily closely related to identity. Many hearing people are surprised to discover that LIS is a proper language connected to a culture and that there is also deaf art. On the other hand, every language has a culture and, consequently, some form of art. There is always this connection. Thus, painting and sculpture proliferate in deaf art, but there is also sign language art in many forms, including poetry, visual vernacular, singing, nursery rhymes. All these art forms are important because they help to strengthen and define identity. If art has developed this way, it means there is a cohesive community with strong cultural roots behind it. Of course, having an identity is very important for artistic expression, but especially for becoming part of the deaf community, because it creates a strong sense of belonging. There are many different disabilities and, as far as deafness is concerned, there is a strong sense of community. Art is a great tool because through art we can also work on performance. Thanks to this, we can be on stage. Painting is also an art form, of course. But we see a painting, not the person who painted it. Or, in the case of music, we can listen to it, but we do not see a body. We can read a book, but the author's body is not there. Instead, with performance, we see that specific person with that specific body on stage. It is something visible. We can see who's there. There's a representation of this body. And so our identity and culture are represented.

STEFANIA:

Speaking of representation, tomorrow we will see your performance, Autoritratto, in which you, Diana, investigate the relationship between the inner and outer gaze. So performing can be an opportunity for deaf artists to self-determine, choose how to represent themselves and also challenge stereotypical representations related to deafness, deaf culture or identity.

DIANA:

Yes, tomorrow, my performance will focus on the theme of the gaze. There's not just one type of gaze: for example, there's my gaze while I look at others. In my case, it's a calm gaze, that of a deaf person who can easily sign. Or it may be the gaze of another person watching me, a different gaze. It can be me looking at someone, it can be me looking at myself, it can be someone looking at me... There are many kinds of gazes, depending on the point of view. In general, we can define performance can in different and variable ways. I personally believe that the goal of art is to change definitions and paradigms. Let's say I am given the definition of deaf or another label: this definition can be subverted, twisted, explored, altered. And that's why art is so important. Because, as I said before, thanks to art, I can see that deaf people can do many things. Someone who uses sign language can be on the stage, they can be visible. And, yes, this is extremely important.

STEFANIA:

These days we are talking about access power and the conditions of access to the art world and, more generally, to cultural programming. In your experience as people but also as artists, what are the access conditions that affect the deaf community and which are often unseen or misunderstood by the cultural organisations with which you have interacted? Let's start with Nikita or Daniel. Who would like to speak?

DANIEL:

Perhaps the question is not very clear to me. Could you repeat it, please?

STEFANIA:

What are the access conditions for deaf people that you find are often less considered or not understood when you are dealing with a cultural organisation or experiencing a cultural event, so both as a spectator and as an artist?

DANIEL:

I think it really depends on the type of work. Because if it is a visual performance, that is enough: I can understand it just by watching it. However, if it uses speech or a language I do not know, I might need an interpreter. But it really depends on the show. We cannot say there is a kind of "fixed" accessibility or that a specific device is always needed. At times, seeing a performance may be enough because it is already in sign language, and we do not need anything else. Other times, however, when it comes to performances within the hearing society, the presence of an interpreter might be necessary...

DIANA:

At festivals and events, the important thing would be to have at least one person who knows sign language and can communicate in that language, for example, in case of an emergency, a fire, or even if I have to ask where the toilet is. I need a person who can sign: it does not have to be an interpreter, but a person with at least a basic knowledge of Italian Sign Language within the staff is enough. The toilet is just an example, I can find it by myself. But for information and communication in general, at least one person on staff needs that knowledge. And then I would also add that it depends precisely on the venue, because, for example, if it is too dark – as some hearing shows are, to create a romantic atmosphere – we cannot see.

NIKITA:

So far, I have to say that I have seen a lot of situations in the field of theatre. It always depends on the type of work. If it is a dance performance, I do not demand any accessibility. If, on the other hand, I am aware that it is a theatrical performance with a substantial spoken part, I do not go to that performance or, out of curiosity, I can go there only to watch. It depends on the goal. We cannot expect everything to be made accessible, and it would be a waste of time to only focus on limitations and difficulties: life goes on. Of course, if there is accessibility in Italian Sign Language, everything is more beautiful and fulfilling. It allows for collaboration and reflection. It is true, however, that this does not happen often but only occasionally. It's almost a miracle! As far as art is concerned, as Daniel said earlier, it depends on each situation. Of course, I wish sign language were more present because, generally, we have the same needs as hearing people. Speaking for myself, I do not expect things. If I need something, I can ask for it. I don't just expect it.

STEFANIA:



During these days, the subject of rights has come up. And, consequently, how accessibility is, first and foremost, a right. We were talking about this during one of the workshops. And also about the element of contextuality, of how accessibility is very much a contextual path, which depends on the type of performance, the event, the target communities. Another element that has emerged, and which I believe is an important point for reflection to counteract a totalising vision of accessibility, according to which accessibility is something that always applies equally to everyone, is that accessibility is a process. Thank you for your participation. I know that the event has to go on, we will talk about it, and we will keep talking about it tomorrow during the symposium, where the discussion will continue and be open to the public. Thank you very much. How do we say goodbye? Thank you.

NIKITA:

Thank you.

DANIEL:

Can I emphasize one thing? In our workshop, we focused on deaf culture because, before explaining what sign language is, we need to take a step back and talk about deaf culture and the term "deaf". We are deaf people, but we are not all the same: we can say that each of us represents a different type of deafness. For example, during a performance, I might want a sign language interpreter because they can provide me with that kind of service. But other deaf people may not want an interpreter: I know Italian Sign Language very well because I use it daily. Other deaf people, on the other hand, do not know sign language because they use another language. Maybe just Italian, English or any other language. Within a performance, accessibility in Italian Sign Language is not suitable for all deaf people. I may have a friend who is deaf – just as deaf as I am – but does not know Italian Sign Language. And so you have to think of another kind of accessibility: if a person cannot hear speech and does not know that sign language, maybe there can be another strategy, for example, subtitles. So it always depends on the situation. We should always remember that deaf people are not all the same. And so everyone has different needs. Clearly, this is not easy, and we also try to reflect on this difficulty. However, people who organise and work at events and festivals must be aware of this. Because just as with the disability macro-group, there are sub-groups within deafness and finding an appropriate strategy is quite a challenge.

DIANA:

Yes. I'd like to add one thing. What you said is true. I'd just like to clarify something because people might watch the video and say: "Okay then, we will not use interpreters. We'll use just subtitles so everyone's happy." Stop! No! Once again, of course, subtitles

can be a great help for deaf people who do not know sign language. But people who know sign language would prefer sign language accessibility over subtitles because it is an actual language and the feedback is better, whereas subtitles would not be equally adequate. To those who think it would be better to use just subtitles to make all deaf people happy, I want to say that it is not the case. It's a big challenge, it's true.

STEFANIA:

Thank you. Thank you very much! Bye bye.

EVERYONE:

Thank you.