Talking through the body. Creating of common world and changing the community through a theatrical performance, a case study.

By
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I. Abstract

This thesis aims to present a practical example of how art can become an instrument capable of investigating, showing and facing a social problem. For doing so, art can overcome communication issues; secondly, it can create a “common world” of shared values that leads to changes in society. The ethnographic example shown here is set among the theatrical company of the KulturParken association (Uppsala, Sweden), which works with people with disability. The fieldwork focuses on the development and staging of their theatrical show “Sagan om Liv och Lust” which deals with the problem of sexuality and disability.

The thesis structure follows two main arguments: communication process and evolution in society. The arguments are framed and analysed through the embodied knowledge concept and Turner’s theory about ritual in theatre, as well as through Kester’s dialogical and relational aesthetic theory and Rancière’s Dissensus one.

This thesis highlights how disability arts and a disability aesthetic allowed the members of the company to develop a personal awareness, leading them to overcome self-imposed barriers and those imposed by society. Moreover, it shows how the receivers of the theatrical message become active actors themselves, carrying forward the communicative process.

Keywords: art, communication, community, disability, sexuality, theatre performance, ritual, liminality, embodied knowledge, dissensus, dialogical aesthetic, relational aesthetic, disability arts, disability aesthetic
II. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who, with opinions, suggestions and with moral support, have allowed the realization of this work.

First, the members of the Kulturparken association that with generosity, willingness and creativity have welcomed me and shared their thoughts, points of view and ontologies with me. A special thank for giving me the chance to challenge myself and push me beyond my limits.

I also want to thank the members and friends from the Bredsjö KulturKooperativ for have helped me at the beginning of this journey. Thank for their hospitality, the artistic experience that we have shared and the litres of mint tea that warmed up our nights.

A special thank go to my family, my parents and my brother, who always supported me during my experience of the Master in Anthropology at Uppsala University.

A great thank to Jacopo, who never stopped believing in me and have supported me with love and kindness. Thanks also, if not overall, to Giorgio, Alice, Erika and Lara, who have motivated and pushed me during my university path. I would have been lost without you.

Finally, a big thank to my supervisor Charlotta Widmark for her feedback and kind guidance. Thank you for having bet on me and run with me against time, allowing me to achieve this academic goal.
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1. Introduction

In this study, I present a practical example of how art can become an instrument capable of showing and facing a social problem. I approaching the idea that Schechner developed, according to which the way performances are created—in training, workshops, and rehearsals—is the key paradigm for social process (Schechner 2010). To do this, I have dealt with my analysis through two topics, the first being the problem of non-communication (or miscommunication, which in this specific ethnographic example manifests itself not only in non-comprehension, but also in non-listening). The second topic addresses how overcoming non-communication can create a “common world” (Rancière Jacques 2016) of shared perspectives and values, which in turn leads to a change in the community in which the artistic medium is manifested.

To carry out this analysis, I decided to conduct my research fieldwork at the KulturParken association, based in Uppsala. KulturParken is a non-profit organization which works professionally with community culture and cultural education. Among their goals are the will to promote excellence in the field of art through a process of vision, education, and communication; the implementation of cultural projects thanks to coordinated work between communities of a certain urban area and professional artists; and the promotion of teaching culture through amateur theatrical productions, private courses, collaborations with schools, and other outdoor activities. Amongst the various projects one stands out in particular: “Rätten att leva mitt liv” (The right to live my life). This is a project that investigates the issue of sex and relationships through emphasizing the right to live both fully, particularly from the point of view of people with disabilities. KulturParken manages the project together with FUB Uppsala, Hälsa och Habilitering, and Uppsala Kommun, while funds come from the Heritage Fund. In the context of this project, I was able to observe the development and staging of the show “Sagan om Liv och Lust” (“The Story of Life and Lust”) which deals directly with the problem of sexuality.

The choice of this association was dictated by three aspects: first, its use of art, mostly theatre, to investigate cultural identity and transmit it to the public (the use of word “public” here implies both the audience of the theatrical production and the political aspect). Second is its aim of facing a social problem through the same use of artistic expression. Last is its work with what may be called a minority identity. This is an important aspect for my analysis, since a minor identity is usually something perceived and placed far away from what we call the “normal” situation of our here and now. This distance of perspective and perception, combined with the lack of a “common world” of shared values, is precisely where the phenomenon of miscommunication takes place.

In fact, the purpose of my study is the analysis of the use of art as tool among people with disabilities at the KulturParken association. I want to see how they explore their identities and conditions
in the contemporary context through the concept of embodied knowledge and learning and to frame their artistic work using Victor Turner’s theory of theatre as ritual. I want also to use the concept of dialogical aesthetic to analyse their art as expression and share their discoveries and ideas. By doing this, I will show the change that occurred in the same members of the company, the prejudice and fear they have managed to overcome, and the achievement of a new awareness of their own identity. Lastly, I want to present the changes that developed in society after this theatrical process of communication.

1.1 Research aim and questions

My purpose is to explore the role of art in overcoming communication issues among different actors in various contexts, particularly where these problems can be generated by cultural gaps. Much of this work has been carried forward by having in the background the words of Rancière on politics, aesthetics, and dissensus (Rancière 2015) — in particular, this quote from an interview by Ilaria Bussoni and Fabrizio Ferraro for OperaViva magazine:

I would say that any creative act is that act that creates the world in which we can perceive this creation. Art does not consist only in creating works, but in creating something like the sensitive fabric of those same works. (Rancière Jacques 2016)

In fact, in this statement we can recognize both the creative power that distinguishes art itself, and the communicative power that can manifest itself thanks to the creation of a context in which that same artistic work acquires meaning.

Between the various artistic media, my research focuses on theatrical performances that use the human body as an instrument of investigation. Thus, through this study I want to investigate how this medium is capable of create a more effective communication on issues that are otherwise not taken into consideration seriously or are considered taboo and thus avoided. With this objective in mind, in this work I want to show one of the numerous functions of the arts that can be used as a tool in service to the community.

I argue that through theatrical communication it is possible to create a new awareness of the social issue taken into account, as well as a “common world” of shared values between the two (or more) identity groups that stay on the borders of the cultural gap, Thus, this communication process leads to a change in society, which brings the creation of what can be defined as a new community.

To investigate the aim of my research, this work focuses on a specific study case of KultruParken association. Given this ethnographic context, my main research questions are as follows:
- How does the KulturParken association use art to investigate and show the problem of sexuality suffered by people with disabilities? How does this activity bring changes within society and create a new community?

In order to deepen my insight, I am also asking the following questions:

- How does the body become an instrument of investigation?
- How can theatrical performance help the communication process?
- How much does theatrical performance move/sensitize society?
- What kind of community is created through theatre?
- How do power relations change?

As I said previously, the association works with minority identity, and we need to consider the cultural patterns and the set of behaviours that this involves. It is a matter of perspective, or different points of view. This aspect is crucial for the choice of theatre as artistic medium in this analysis. From one side, the theatre can be seen as the utter manifestation of the performance concept and the fusion of other expressive techniques, making it a sort of artistic compendium, together with its ritualistic aspect (Turner 1986). From the other side, it became the artistic expression that best shows the concept of embodied knowledge: culture is embodied in our bodies, movements, tastes, senses, and emotions. The body knows and remembers, creating an archive of knowledge in our cultural base. Hence, theatre is a highly effective means of communication: because the main communication tool is the body, it can also overcome the linguistic barrier.

1.2 Relevance

Often, when we talk about art in the anthropology field, we can find firstly a deep connection with primitive art (Boas and Jonaitis 2010) or with art as an aesthetic expression for a certain historically and geographically settled culture. (Morphy and Perkins 2009; Coote 1994) Secondly, the focus is usually on the art product and its meaning within the society, its materiality, and its context and history. During the second half of the 20th Century, the focus moved from non-Western objects and aesthetics presented to Western audiences to engagement with Western art products themselves. (Marcus and Myers 1995) Thus, the focus of study today is on the criticism of contemporary Western art. However, it seems that the main character remains the artifact itself, leaving out the artistic process that actually involves peoples’ actions. (Marcus and Myers 1995)

It is to that academic environment that this thesis aims to bring a further step, since I focus on the communicative power manifested within the artistic process. This study can be seen as an intersection point between anthropology, sociology, and art. Even better, it can be considered a legacy of studies by
Michael Jackson (2016), who deepened how we think of works of art in focusing on how art effects transformations in our lives, as well as by Tim Ingold (2013). With his book *Making* in particular, Ingold focuses on the making process that unites anthropology, archaeology, art, and architecture in exploring the conditions and potentials of human life.

Moreover, I can here use the words of Grant Kester, a professor of art history at the University of California (San Diego) and the founding editor of *FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*, taken from his book *Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art*:

While it is common for a work of art to provoke dialogue among viewers, this typically occurs in response to a finished object. (…) on the other hand, conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself. It is reframed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse, and the perceived inevitability of partisan political conflict. (Kester 2013:8)

He continues a little further, highlighting the crux of the matter: “we are too familiar with the ways in which communication can fail; what we urgently need are models for how it can succeed.” (Kester 2013)

My aim is to present the work of KulturParken association as an example of such models, in its ability to produce positive practices for the creation of new forms of intersubjective experience with social or political activism. I believe this research has a double value: first, as a practical example of Turner’s ritual theory and dialogical aesthetic concept, as presented through the analysis of this ethnographic context; and consequently, as a demonstration of the evolution of the same components of the company, who through the ritual process and their embodied knowledge reach their own awareness and manage to overcome their own barriers (and the public one as well).

Furthermore, even if the main focus of the research is the artistic process and its communicative power, this study explores indirectly the actual situation of people with disability, with particular attention to the issue of sexuality. Thus, it can be helpful in increasing the knowledge about such issues, while placing more attention on them.

1.3 Theoretical approach

The first theory we encounter in this exposition is the concept of embodied knowledge (Tanaka 2011; Merleau-Ponty 2013; Gallagher 2005), adding also the parallel concept of embodied learning (Stolz 2015) for analysing the theatrical work of the KulturParken association, to understand the identity investigation pursued there and the interaction of the different members with different attitudes and bodies. I also use these concepts to frame my own experience: this theory helps me to put the self-
reflexivity I developed during the fieldwork into the correct perspective, which covers an important part of my actual knowledge. Also used in the analysis is Turner’s theory on the ritual aspect of the theatre. (Turner 1986, 1988; 2017) I used it for deepening the specific work of the theatrical company, but this aspect can also be taken outside the rehearsal room, to analyse the interactions of the public and how this work becomes a means of communication. Then I highlight the active involvement aspect of the art through the theoretical approach of dialogical and relational aesthetics (Kester 2013), thanks to which the public is made an integral part of the artistic and communicative process. Last, I briefly analyse how power relations change after the performance staging, thanks to Rancière’s Dissensus theory (Rancière 2015).

I want to briefly present here the two main theories that I used: the embodied knowledge theory and Turner’s ritual theory.

1.3.1 Embodied knowledge and learning

We can give an initial definition of embodied knowledge by saying that the body becomes a sort of archive, with all of the information we have collected during our life stored inside it. It encompasses both a cultural background and set of behaviours, realized through our everyday life. However, we must always keep in mind the relationship between body and mind. (Gallagher 2005) In fact, without the mind it would not be possible to decode the reality that surrounds us. Indeed, this is a vast subject about which many scholars have developed analyses and theories. (Tanaka 2011)

The first notion of embodied knowledge is derived from French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s approach to phenomenology. According to Csordas, he “lays out his position as a critique of empiricism. He examines the constancy hypothesis, which asserts that since perception originates in external stimuli that are registered by our sensory apparatus, there is a 'point by point correspondence and constant connection between the stimulus and elementary perception’. ” (Csordas 1990:8) Merleau-Ponty describes a kind of implicit and unconscious knowledge that develops in the body, which the French scholar defines as knowledge bred of familiarity (savoir de familiarité) and which becomes the principle on which embodied knowledge is based. He assumes also that “everything depends, that is, upon the fact that our glances are not ‘acts of consciousness’, each of which claims an invariable priority, but openings of our flesh which are immediately filled by the universal flesh of the world.” (Merleau-Ponty 1964:16)

On the other side are Bourdieu’s thoughts on habitus and the socially informed body: “parallel to Merleau-Ponty's goal of moving the study of perception from objects to the process of objectification, Bourdieu's goal is to move beyond analysis of the social fact as opus operatum, to the analysis of the modus operandi of social life. His strategy is to collapse the dualities of body-mind and sign-significance
in the concept of habitus.” (Csordas 1990:11) In other words, the concreteness of the experience lies in the bodily synthesis of visualization, affect, and kinesthesis.

Although these were the two great schools of thought at the birth of the concept of embodied knowledge, contemporary scholars have brought new points of view. Thomas J. Csordas (1990) states that “the incipient paradigm of embodiment both Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu require the collapse of such analytic dualities.” (Csordas 1990:34) Further, he points out that a change in the methodological postulate in the consideration of the body is necessary. Thus, the body is no longer seen as an object to be studied in relation to culture, but rather as its subject, “as the existential ground of culture.” (Csordas 1990:5)

Along with the concept of embodied knowledge, we need to analyse and keep in mind the semiotic issue of understanding the different meanings of a body. In fact, as Sonesson assumes in his work *From the meaning of embodiment to the embodiment of meaning: A study in phenomenological seDiotics,*

“(…) embodiment gives rise to two separate strands in the field of phenomenology: first, in relation to the physical body of the subject itself and/or his or her counterpart in perceptual space, the generic other; second, in relation to signs and other overarching structures, which, like the physical body, appear in the mind, without being of the mind, and seem to require physical substratum in order to exist.” (Sonesson 2007:87)

Embodied perspectives hold that our engagement with the world is neither purely theoretical nor entirely cognitive; it is also emotional, practical, and aesthetic. (Stolz 2015) Thus, we come to know a thing not only by theorizing or thinking about it but also by feeling, doing, and appreciating it (Forgasz 2015). In the theatre, the body and the embodiment become the learning tool. If we take a theatrical performance as an enacted, embodied action, we can see how it “takes on the metaphorical experience to process both meaning and understanding, and to rehearse possibilities of transformation, intervention, and change” (Alexander and Myers 2010). This concept is strictly connected with the theory of embodied learning. This contemporary pedagogical theory emphasizes the use of the body in educational practice. It involves coming to know ourselves and the world around us, making us a ‘lived body’ that is active in this development process. (Stolz 2015).

**1.3.2 Turner’s ritual theory**

In terms of ritual and theatre, I need to present the most important idea at the basis of Turner’s work: the social drama. He defines it as “a sequence of social interactions of a conflictive, competitive, or agonistic type.” (Turner 2013)
A social drama is primarily manifested as the rupture of a norm, as the breaking of a moral rule, of the law, of custom or of the etiquette in some public circumstance. (…) In any case, it produces a growing crisis, a fracture or an important turn in the relationships between the members of a social field, in which the apparent peace is changed into open conflict and latent antagonisms become visible.¹ (Turner 2013)

Thus, social drama takes place when a turning point is generated within a society. Social dramas reveal "subcutaneous layers" of the social structure, from which emerge the opposing elements that compose it. (Turner 1986) In doing so, they generate oppositions within social categories (e.g., classes, ethnic groups, roles) that disturb their crystallized status. These oppositions become space for debate in which it is possible to carry out a critical revision of the socio-cultural structure itself. (Turner 2013)

Turner identifies this same place of debate within the abstract and non-fixed territory of socio-cultural liminality, where a phase of transition generally occurs from the institutionalized cultural situation to new spontaneous aggregations. For exploring liminal phenomenology, Victor Turner had in mind the research and work of Arnold Van Gennep, especially the book Les rites de passage, published in France in 1909.

Traditionally, "rites of passage" relate to a change in an individual or group’s social status, or to seasonal changes affecting an entire society. From these, Turner took the procedural form of the passage and transported it to the theatre. He recognizes three ritual phases: (1) separation, thanks to which the sacred space and time are delimited; it implies a symbolic behaviour representing the separation of the ritual subjects from their previous social status; (2) transition, margin, or limen, during which the ritual subjects go through a period and a zone of ambiguity that has little in common with social statuses and previous cultural conditions (this is where the “levelling” process take place); (3) incorporation, in which phenomena or symbolic actions represent the subjects’ achievement of their new position in society as a whole. (Turner 1988)

In defying socio-cultural liminality, Turner states the following:

Liminality may involve a complex sequence of episodes in sacred space-time and may also include subversive and ludic (or playful) events. The cultural factors are isolated, as far as this is possible to do with plurivocal symbols. […] Then, these cultural factors or elements can be recombined in many, often grotesque ways because they are arranged according to possible or imaginary combinations instead of those which are dictated by experience. (…) In other words, in liminality people “play” with elements in the sphere of the familiar and render them

¹ Translated from Italian by the author
unfamiliar. Novelty is born from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements. (Turner 2013:57)

Turner also adds the concept of “anti-structure,” that is, the dissolution of the normative social structure with its sets of roles, status designations, rights, and legal duties. The liminal area could also be seen as a space of social and cultural hybridization: "the essence of liminality consists in the decomposition of culture in its constitutive factors and in the free or 'playful' re-composition of the same in every possible configuration, however bizarre.” (Turner 2013:61).

However, if until now Turner has closely watched Van Gennep's theoretical reflection, it is further developed in what Turner calls liminoid phenomenologies. These are potentially fruitful areas of rewriting the cultural codes that lead to social transformation. According to Turner, within these phases of cultural change, new ways are created to face, understand, provide meaning for, and sometimes solve crises, especially through the arts. You play with the factors of culture, collecting them in unusual combinations, sometimes casual, grotesque, improbable, or surprising. Mixing up the pieces that constitute the collective imagination leads to a state that Turner defines as liminoid. The liminoid therefore resembles the liminal, without being identical to it, for its character of transforming possibility creates the non-place in which it is possible to play with symbols and crystallized cultural belongings, giving rise to unusual combinations undermining the foundations of the familiar. (Turner 1988) The ritual is therefore both serious and playful: Victor Turner sees great importance in acting through play and entertainment. Thanks to free and spontaneous experimentation typical of games, different creative experiences are generated. Hence, it is possible to modify our collective imagination by recombining familiar cultural elements (or in other words codifying them) according to unusual aggregations so that new meanings are created: “such as trees, images, paintings, dance figures, etc., each of which may assume not one, but diverse meanings.” (Turner 2017, 2013)

In this zone of ambiguity and creation, we can find what Turner defines as communitas: “the (re)formation of affectual relationships with co-liminars” (St John 2008:7). In communitas, Turner recognizes the liberation of the human potentials of knowledge, feeling, volition, and creativity — free of the normative constraints that require one to occupy a role relating to social status. Also, communitas offers “full, unmediated communication, even communion” (Turner 1988:58) between the participants. From here, a social structure develops in which the initial free and innocent relationships between individuals, prior to the rite, are transformed into relationships regulated by norms between social persons. Three distinct and concatenated forms can arise: the spontaneous communitas of intense and profound interaction between individuals who feel the sensation of infinite power, as in a sort of common mystical participation; the ideological communitas, a set of theoretical concepts that attempt to describe the interactions that take place in spontaneous communitas; and the normative communitas,
a permanent social system, subculture, or group that tries to promote or preserve the spontaneous *communitas* relationships on a more-or-less stable basis. (Turner 1988)

1.4 Methods

The methodology used in this research consists of archival and historical research, with data collection through the media and journal’s archives, and fieldwork carried out from the early spring of 2017 to October of the same year.

One of the main sources of the archival research was the study *Loneliness and its Opposite: Sex, Disability, and the Ethics of Engagement* by Don Kulick and Jens Rydström, in which they show and compare the issues encountered by people with disabilities when their right to live a full sexual life is addressed, in the two contexts of Denmark and Sweden. This study proved important for the development of the background and contextualization of my study as well. Another source was the journal of the Centre for Disability Research at Uppsala University (Centrum för forskning om funktionshinder): http://www.cff.uu.se/. I also collected data by reading newspapers that covered that topic, along with the review of the show “Sagan om Liv och Lust” presented by KulturParken. I analysed this material with the aim of understanding how the show was received by the audience and the media. Finally, I analysed several studies concerning art as a communication tool.

During the fieldwork, I used two methods: unstructured interviews and participant observation. (Bernard 2011; Davies 2002). The latter was the huge provision on which I could count, not only for the data collection itself, but also for the important factor of my self-reflexivity. In fact, I had the opportunity to participate actively in the activities of the cooperative, as well as to conduct an external and more detached observation. That meant not only having a part in daily activities that allowed for direct observation, but also the use of my own body for investigating the concepts of embodied knowledge and learning and applying the so-called embodied ethnography. (Turner 2007) Moreover, I was able to take advantage of my direct knowledge of the theatrical field, thanks to several years of theoretical and historical study, as well as of acting and performing. That made me what Bernard Russell call a “complete observer” — while deviating from his idea of “becoming a member of a group without letting on that you’re there to do research” (Bernard 2011:347). The members of the association were aware of my purpose, which allowed me to obtain good qualitative data. (Bernard 2011:344)

Then I had the unstructured interview. Actually, that was a tricky situation, even if this kind of interview can be exchanged for a simple one: “unstructured interviewing goes on all the time and just about anywhere—in homes, walking along a road, weeding a millet field, hanging out in bars, or waiting for a bus.” (Bernard 2011:210) Among the members of KulturParken, that kind of interview was difficult
to pursue due to my lack of language competence at the time. Because I repeatedly had to request the intervention of someone who could act as interpreter, I have very few interviews.

I also had the chance to collect direct and indirect observations (my own and those of other people, who shared them with me). This happened when I got to speak with the audience before and after the premiere of the show “Sagan om Liv och Lust.” At that precise moment, an intriguing union was created between my current observations, those of the public, and the previous ones I had of the theatre company at work. (Bernard 2011; Davies 2002)

1.5 Chapters overview

I would like to briefly present the content of each chapter, giving a direction to the discourse developed herein.

Chapter 2. Defining the field
In this chapter I define the fieldwork, with the presentation of the KulturParken association and the issue that it proposes to face: sexuality among people with disability, introducing the work of Don Kulick and Jens Rydström, Then I go through all the parts that compose my experience at KulturParken (rehearsal, performance, conference, etc.). Then I develop a focus on my self-reflexivity, as a part of the research sees my own body as a tool for investigating embodied knowledge. I also present the challenge and limitations faced along the way and ethical reflections, with a focus on my entering the field. That was a particular moment: with the KultuParken association I had to face some cultural clash, my lack of Swedish in primis, but also the very specific situation of being a person commonly referred to as “normal” surrounded by people with disability.

Chapter 3. Context/background
In this chapter, the contexts from which I start are presented. First, I briefly define theatrical performance, presenting also the recognition of the language and power of political impact of the artistic medium nowadays. Later, I talk about disability identity and the social model of disability and culture, along with how these concepts redefine the idea of disability as weakness. Then I address briefly the relationship between art and disability and introduce disability aesthetics, underlining its emancipating power.

In the next chapters I provide the ethnographic data collected and their analysis:

Chapter 4. Enter in the field
In this chapter I present the first approach to my research, starting from when it was still a vague idea in my mind, before finding its shape after the meeting with the Bredsjö KulturKooperativ. Thereafter, I show the first day within the real subject of my discourse: the KulturParken association, presenting my informants, the place in which we met, etc.
Chapter 5. The Body
In this chapter, the true analysis starts. I explain how the body is used as instrument of investigation and communication and present the observations I made within the KulturParken association.

Chapter 6. Rituality
I present here the sacral aspect of art and its ability to transcend the material world and reach a state in which signifier and signified are understandable and shared by all users of art itself, thanks also to the ritual aspect of performance as shown by Turner. The latter involves not only the specific environment of the theatre company, but also the society around it: I look at the structure of both a typical rehearsal day and the day of the Premiere show.

Chapter 7. The evolution on and off the stage
In this chapter I propose to show what happened during the communication process from the theatre company to the audience at the show. I reveal how this process enables an awareness on both sides (actors and public), while bringing the possibility to create community (or rather to modify a precedent one). I present how the audience received the messages from the theatrical medium, and how this can allow the overcoming of fear, shame, and prejudice. I will also show how art actively involves the recipient of the message with the use of the dialogical and relational aesthetic concepts.

Chapter 8. More than theatrical work
In this chapter I want to show the last step of this development. First, I present the aim and purpose of the KulturParken association, which focuses on social issues through education and sensitization. This purpose, together with the theatrical performance and all of its influences within the audience, lead to the growth of the so-called communitas and a change in power relations.
2. Defining the field

In this chapter, I present the fieldwork, the association where I developed my research, and the different phases that compose it. Also, I briefly explain the main social issue considered by the association itself. Later, I show the self-reflexivity and issues encountered during the research.

The research at KulturParken developed on several levels. The fieldwork took place mostly between March and April 2017, when I followed the theatre company during the process of rehearsing and staging their show. During this time, I could collect very informal interviews and various participant observation data and experiences. Then I witnessed the Premiere show at the Gottsunda Dance & Teater in March and the “Jag har Lust!” conference in October.

2.1 KulturParken Association

To describe it in more detail, “the KulturParken works together with those who live and work in an area, with professional artists through productions, course activities, collaboration with schools and in projects.” Moreover, the community has a positive response to their work. (KulturParken 2018)

In 2017, the association was mainly active in the county of Uppsala, thanks to the help of key partners such as Uppsala Municipality, FUB Uppsala, Uppsala Region, Gränby School, Kulturens Bildningsverksamhet, and Gottsunda Dance & Teater. In this context, the project “Rätten att leva mitt liv”, which began on 1st December 2014 and ended 31st December 2017, completed its third and final year with workshops, rehearsals, a tour in Sweden with the performance of “Sagan om Liv och Lust”, staging in Uppsala, Stockholm, Kumla, Lerum, Göteborg and Umeå, and a National Conference held in the UKK, Uppsala. In this project, KulturParken was supported in the implementation by the Arvsfonden, in collaboration with FUB Uppsala, Uppsala Region (Hälsa och Habilitering) and the Municipality of Uppsala (Kultur i vården). Moreover, the opinions and thoughts of the participants of the workshops and the conference were also presented to politicians and authorities at local, regional, and national levels. The project was very successful during the year and had a great impact at the national level. A total of 1716 people participated in its activities during 2017, of which 909 attended “Sagan om Liv och Lust”, with accompanying workshops.

2.1.1 Rehearsal

The rehearsals took place at the headquarters of KulturParken. This is a kind of farmhouse with many houses. One of them is the private home of one of the members/directors of the association, while the largest structure is used as a rehearsal and office space. Upon entering, you find yourself in a white-
walled apartment, divided into two zones: the part where the rehearsals take place is bordered by a corner sofa that separates it from the entrance area and kitchen. Separated from this first room are the bathroom, office, and warehouse. The rehearsals took place on alternate days and covered most of the day, from 9am to 3pm. In addition to the actual rehearsals, there were the convivial moments with which the day opened: breakfast is made together, and this is also a time of leisure to talk freely about any topics. After breakfast follows a first circle of sharing. It may not look like it, but in fact this time is already part of the theatrical work. The difference is in how the company’s members present themselves during this time: silent and collected, they are not necessarily serious, but they are more present and conscious. The members talk about their moods or their connection with their characters, but also about technical topics related to the show, the tour, or the day’s rehearsals. This is usually done in Swedish, but I could take advantage of Nanna, the director/administrator, and Sara and Ellinor, two of the company’s actresses, who helped me with translations. After the circle, the technical rehearsals took place until 12-12.30, when usually we stopped for lunch. Like breakfast, this was a more relaxed moment than the morning circle: it was to distract the mind without losing that sense of cohesion that came to light during the first part of the day. After lunch, the rehearsals restarted, this time in a more spontaneous way. If the morning was more specific concerning scene movements, timings, and music, the afternoon work was more intense from the point of view of interpretation, going deeper into the character or the situation and focusing more on emotions. After these more intense (and tiresome) rehearsals, a new circle is formed in which people discuss the work just done: all members of the company expose their mood, perplexity, emotions, and so on, to improve from the next performance. Often, on these occasions I was actively involved as an external opinion giver (as a spectator) or as an unofficial actress. In fact, during some rehearsals, I could take part in the show myself, reaching a very participative level of observation. From this point of view, it was interesting to experience the various levels of observation (from sitting on the couch taking notes, to giving technical help, to being an actress during the rehearsals). The day usually ended with a fika (traditional Swedish coffee break), during which the actors (and I) slowly bent the character or role that was sustained during the rehearsals back to themselves. This is one of the most interesting moments of community building, since the group has just shared something strong and intense that still lurks in the air, but slowly it subsides around and inside us.

2.1.2 Production

"Sagan om Liv och lust” is the theatrical piece created and performed by the company between 2016 and 2017, which falls within the macro-project “Rätten att leva mitt liv”. The story itself is quite simple, but this is an effective show that leaves no space for misunderstanding. It is about sex and how everyone has the right to live it fully and well. This is a vast subject, about which I realized I have only scratched the surface. To explore it, I largely referred to the study conducted by Don Kulick and Jens Rydström, and exhibited in Loneliness and its opposite. (Kulick and Rydström 2015) This book is also
one of KulturParken's points of reference. Kulick and Rydström state that “none of the people with whom we spoke (…) thought that the situation in Sweden regarding sexuality for people with disabilities was satisfactory.” (Kulick and Rydström 2015:265) It is evident that the phenomenon of sexuality among people with disabilities is a problem still in search of a solution. I would like to report here what Kulick and Rydström identify as the causes of this situation.

In the first place is a simple and nevertheless devastating fact: we do not talk about it, and it is not just about ignorance. The crux of the matter is that a taboo is recognized in addressing this topic, since “the sexual desires and lives of women and men with disabilities is a subject that makes many nondisabled people deeply uncomfortable.” (Kulick and Rydström 2015:2) This perception leads us to the second cause that the two scholars recognize: there is a widespread prejudice about disability, and the idea that “disability = helplessness” often encourages people to associate disabled adults with children and, hence, with sexual innocence and asexuality. (Kulick and Rydström 2015:5) Consequently, it is perceived that the expression and experience of a full and healthy sexuality does not concern them. However, numerous studies have largely disproved this idea, demonstrating its essential prejudice. So, if belonging to the world of sexuality has been affirmed and a discomfort in the impossibility of living the experience to the full has been shared, why is the theme of the sexuality of disabled people still one of conflict? In effect, the third cause is that the problem is not recognized as such. Indeed, it can sometimes be mistaken for a persistent request for special rights. Another possible cause is the effective practical resolution of the problem. When we talk about disability we almost always think of a physical impediment. When it comes to sexuality, this theme becomes, if possible, even more intrusive. The issue that arises is how to help a disabled person have a sex life. Unfortunately, “no one seems able to imagine that it is possible to facilitate sex for a disabled person without either contacting a prostitute, who would have sex with them or, barring that, by actually sexually servicing the person being assisted.” (Kulick and Rydström 2015:105-106) This apparent need to contact someone within the sex market causes a sort of “moral panic,” to avoid which one also avoids addressing the problem at first. However, if one wants to try to find a solution without necessarily contacting a prostitute, here he/she runs into another black beast: the fear of abuse, which presents itself under two opposite and specular situations. One of these aspects is connected to the idea of the innocence of the disabled person. As a result, taking an active part in the approach of this person to the world of sexuality can easily be interpreted as an act of abuse. Fear of abuse therefore becomes fear of an accusation. On the other hand, the abuse can be perceived by the same assistant who finds himself/herself facing the issue of sexuality. (Kulick and Rydström 2015:87-88) Last, but not least, is the “pervasive insistence in Sweden that sexuality is ‘private.’” (Kulick and Rydström 2015:113) Privacy seems to function there more as a shield or a fence to demarcate an area beyond the bounds of involvement. (Kulick and Rydström 2015:114)
These are some possible causes of dissatisfaction regarding the current situation of people with disabilities and their right to a sexual life. In addition are several attitudes that Sweden puts into practice. These main lines of conduct can be summarized in the two sentences “Don’t wake the sleeping bear” and “If I haven’t done anything, at least I haven’t done anything wrong.” The first thought is clear. Thanks to this mode of thinking, the need for active sexuality “will be ignored, disciplined, or classified as a problem and then passed on to someone who others think may know how to handle it.” (Kulick and Rydström 2015:78) The second thought is perhaps more harmful: “the ‘not doing anything’ part of the ‘If I don’t do anything . . .’ formulation is misleading, however, because personal assistants, staff in group homes, and others who use the phrase do not actually do nothing. The ‘nothing’ they believe themselves to be doing is actually ‘‘something,’ usually something that discourages sex or impedes it.” (Kulick and Rydström 2015:87)

There is, however, a third attitude that I would like to bring to light here. This is the disequilibrium that is created in the discourse on sex itself, for which it is seen as a problem or as a source of conflict only, and not as it should be beyond the mere biological function of reproduction — that is, as a source of pleasure. In his paper *Sexuality and Disability: The Missing Discourse of Pleasure*, Mitchell S. Tepper (2000) argues that:

Sex is portrayed as a privilege of the white, heterosexual, young, single and non-disabled. (…) Sexuality as a source of pleasure and as an expression of love is not readily recognized for populations that have been traditionally marginalized in society. (Tepper 2000:285)

He further includes in this marginalized society people “who are older, who are larger, who are darker, who are gayer,” showing how this widespread problem affects all social levels. Nevertheless, “sexual pleasure is particularly powerful in making one feel alive.” (Tepper 2000:288) Virginia Johnson, speaking to the significance of sexual pleasure, refers to it as “the authentic, abiding satisfaction that makes us feel like complete human beings” (Masters and Johnson 1974:28). Thus, pleasure adds meaning to our lives.

Talking about these causes and attitude, promoting sexual education and trying to find solutions is precisely the aim of the KulturParken association. Moreover, even if people with disabilities are the main target of the group’s work, the spectrum that the association wants to cover thanks to its projects and interventions is broader. Just think of the project in which the show is a part, “Right to live my life” (“Rätten att leva mitt liv”). It uses a wide variety of artistic expressions, including dance and theatre, to speak about relationships and feelings without borders of classification.
2.1.3 Tourneé

On the 31st March 2017, the show “Sagan om Liv och lust” premiered at Gottsunda Dans & Teater. The venue was full, and from the outside one could hear the lively chatter of spectators seeming anxious for the beginning of the show. I was the only non-Swedish speaker, and initially it was not easy for me to set myself among all those people. After identifying Sara, who was presenting a banquet table near the entrance, with books and brochures on the show and on its subject, I had the opportunity to break the ice and managed to speak in English with some of the nearby spectators. At that time, I was a kind of hybrid, halfway between a member of the company and a simple spectator, and I took the first opportunity to talk to people about the theme of the show, KulturParken itself, and art in general. In fact, it was a series of informal interviews. In some cases, I was able to explain who I was and the research I was doing, and I received a very positive response from several viewers, who allowed me to take notes. The show itself was a surprise, because although I already knew everything that would happen on stage, it was like seeing it for the first time. It had a remarkable strength and expressive quality. Next came a workshop (or rather a discussion) about the topics dealt with in the show. This part also took place in Swedish, but fortunately one of the spectators I had talked to was sitting near me and offered to translate the most salient moments of the conversation.

After the premiere, the show moved to Lerum, Umeå, and Göteborg. Unfortunately, for technical reasons I could not follow them on this trip, but I know the structure of the event does not change: first a brief presentation of the association, then the show, and finally the discussion workshop.

2.1.4 Jag har lust – October conference

The conference lasted two days, from 24th to 26th October 2017, and was held at the Uppsala Konsert & Kongress building. It was composed of a first introductory part about the issues addressed (sexuality and relationship, with attention to disabled people, but also considering a more general spectrum), and the theatre was once again used as a communicative medium. Subsequently, workshops with different themes took place. Two attracted my attention: one about self-discovery and the discovery of the relationship with the other (where once again the theatre was used as a research tool); and a specific one on dance as a means of expression (which allows one to go beyond the limits of the body to reach a deeper level of exploration and communication). In these two days I took part in the conference as a photographer. This allowed me to move and observe without interfering too much with the dynamics of the event.
2.2 Reflexivity, issues and ethical consideration

2.2.1 Self-reflexivity

I have already discussed the use of interviews and participant observation during my fieldwork. However, I consider it necessary to explain in more detail the most important tool at my disposal: self-reflexivity.

According to Charlotte Davies, “Reflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference. In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research.” (Davies 2002:4) Thus, reflexivity has a double face. From one side, this proved useful when I realized the lack of interview material collected during the period spent at KulturParken, in addition to the already mentioned use of my own body as tool for the research. Furthermore, contextualising the ethnographical research also from the sensory point of view allows a clearer and more engaging perspective. Regarding this concern, embodied ethnography can be a valid tool not only to approach the subjects of the research, but also a way that allow the researcher to relate his/her knowledge to that of the other. At the same time, this was a double-edged weapon, because “as researchers we are led ‘to reflect on our own subjectivities, and then to reflect upon the reflection in an infinitude of self-reflexive iterations’” (Davies 2002:7)

This is a delicate moment, as I am aware of my limitations. What I propose to do about it is to use my own experience to compare it to the data collected during the observation of my informants, in order to better understand the whole picture.

2.2.2 Issues encountered

During the fieldwork, I encountered some problems that slowed me down. First, I was the language problem, obviously. Although English is widely spoken in Sweden, in some situations I was not able to express myself. In KulturParken, some members of the company cannot speak English (or not fluently), and my lack Swedish fluency at the time did not allow me to have long conversations. Not to mention that my part was mainly participant observation at first, so I did not want to over-modify the usual behaviour within the company: the rehearsal, the discussions, the circle of reflection at the end of the day were almost always done in Swedish. Fortunately, I was already familiar enough to understand most conversations, although I lacked the ability to get involved. When my intent was precisely to support a conversation, if not a real interview, I could count on the help of the director and members to interpret.

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3 I refer here to my essay in the course “Ethnography of the Senses.”
Second, I found managing the time factor to be complex. In fact, the problem was not the lack of time, but the fear of losing and wasting it. Initially, I was almost overwhelmed by panic. However, when I was able to start the collaboration with KulturParken, I just realized how long the route would be in terms of time. I found myself conditioned by theatrical timing, rehearsal, shows, summer break, etc. In fact, this situation fostered an exhausting, almost frustrating condition. All of this activity so diluted over the months made me feel like a dingy boat. In some way, this has influenced my writing process: the long period of pause in summer led me to brood over the data collected during the rehearsal, but without being able to reach true conclusions, since the final part of my fieldwork — the conference — was missing.

2.2.3 Ethical consideration

There was a moment at the beginning of the fieldwork when I did not feel totally comfortable. I must confess that this was the first time I had approached the world of disability so extensively. Although there were other occasions that allowed me to deal with this reality (such as volunteering in projects at the local level in Milan, Italy), I had never before immersed myself on such a profound level. For this reason I believe that the initial impact of working with the KulturParken association has proved to be much stronger than I would have expected.

Initially I really felt like a fish out of water. Not only did I feel an intruder, but my being what is considered “able-bodied” within a small community whose majority of members is otherwise made me in a sense even more different, a condition that scared me and allowed me to grow at the same time. I asked myself a series of questions about how I should behave, including what was the right attitude and tone to use. I tried to put myself in the shoes of those who observed me and think how I should act so as not to be offensive. Only later did I realize that these concerns were due to my ignorance: I understood how to move within this group, and I learned that respect comes precisely from wanting to approach an existence different from one's own. After all, the KulturParken project, their show, and ultimately my own study all talk about one thing in the end: respect.
3. Background and context

This chapter presents the contexts/background of where I started. First, I briefly define theatrical performance, including a recognition of the language and political impact of the artistic medium today. Later, I will talk about disability identity and the social model of disability and culture, along with how this redefines the idea of disability as weakness. Then I will address briefly the relationship between art and disability and introduce disability aesthetics, underlining its emancipating power.

3.1 Art’s value and language

Artistic expression has always been part of the life of human beings, from the dawn of our history, when its use had a purely ritualistic meaning, through religious offer, political propaganda, social protests, up to landscapes and performance art. Although its meaning changes, art has — in its every shades — two intrinsic characteristics. The first is its value as a historical trace, which allows the transmission of knowledge sometimes deeper than archival documents only can give us. The second is its ability to investigate, as analysis and mirror, not only those who created it and the time it belongs to, but also us and our own time. (Bora et al. 2002; Gombrich 2009)

Art underwent profound change during the 1900s, when Impressionism and then Expressionism pulled it away from the academicism that had distinguished the previous art, up to the most daring avant-garde movements such as Dadaism and Cubism, to name a few. This development concerned especially painting and sculpture, but the theatre was also not immune. The theatrical field became detached from classical rigidity and gradually developed new interpretative codes exemplified by the courageous experiments of Futurist theatre, in the theatre of the absurd of Samuel Beckett, the theatre of cruelty of Antonin Artaud, the epic drama of Bertolt Brecht, and so on. After World War II, Western theatre was enriched with new stimuli. After a period of supremacy of the word, the gesture becomes very important again. Methods are developed that place emphasis on the actor’s interpretive emotion and physical training. The artistic research of the 60s and 70s tries to free the actor from the many rules imposed by the culture in which he or she lives (materialistic or not), to get in touch with the instinctive inner nature, which can respond in an efficient and immediate way to external stimuli. The goal of perfecting the actor’s art becomes a moment of personal growth, that also involves meditation practices and oriental philosophy. The influence of these new methods of artistic research on the post-war theatre movement is immense: just think of the Odin Theatre of by Eugenio Barba, the poor theatre of Jerzy Grotowski, the physical theatre of the Living Theatre by Julian Beck and Judith Malina, and their "commercial" applications by the Actor's Studio with Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg. (Bosisio 1995)

What is striking in the evolution of theatrical means is how they have merged with other artistic techniques - dance, visual arts, music - especially since the early 1900s. I speak of the so-called
performance technique, which found its greatest expression in the 1960s and '70s of the last century (especially thanks to the contribution of the great artist Marina Abramović), playing a particular, sometimes borderline role between protest and awakening the condition of the human being. Performance art is an artistic action, generally presented to an audience, which often involves interdisciplinary aspects. It can be written - following a script - or not written, casual or orchestrated carefully, spontaneous or planned, with or without public involvement. It can also be performed live or presented through the media. Performative action generally involves one or more of the four basic elements: time, space, the body of the performer (or alternatively its presence in a medium), and the relationship between the performer and the audience. Artist performance can be made anywhere and with no time limits. The action of an individual or group in a particular place and in a particular time frame constitutes the work itself. (Bora et al. 2002; Bosisio 1995)

3.1.1 Art and language

Art has a language — or rather, many languages in which it is possible to recognize a universality that makes them understandable to everyone. However, other languages require specific knowledge to be understood, while art’s communication process can involve both an empathic and instinctive level, both a mental and a cognitive one. Often, artistic expression uses the languages of everyday communication, such as words, sounds or images, which produce messages when combined - or recombined - in different ways. These messages are attributed to an aesthetic value, but this is just a first aspect that characterizes a work of art. As Panofsky points out: “In a work of art the form cannot be separated from the content: the arrangement of lines and colour, light and shadow, volumes and layers, however enchanting as a show, must also be understood as a carrier of a meaning that goes beyond visual value.”4 (Panofsky 2010) So, the meaning itself become the main character in the artistic communication, even in the – apparently - most classic and easy representation. Thus, in a work of art many levels of reading are already contained, which allow a synesthetic perception of the same. In evaluating a work of art, we need to consider both the aesthetic value and meaning. If we fail in doing so, we will get just a purely taste judgment.

During the twentieth century, the attention to an art work was focused on the content of the work itself and its definition. Or rather, we looked for a definition of the artistic idea hidden in the work. When this idea becomes the real protagonist of interest, artistic experimentation is not confined to the aesthetic value per se, it is expanded to create a wide variety of languages. In this sense, the "media" are nothing but the means by which the artistic idea becomes manifest, so that it is made accessible to the

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4 Translated from Italian by the author.
However, we cannot refer to the communicative process of art as the simple passing on of information (Barfield 2000): if we limit ourselves to considering the processes of coding and decoding only (and as reverse operations), we lose the possibility of considering other variables. One of these variables, for example, is the enrichment of the meaning of the work thanks to the operations of production, passage, and reception of a message; or even the consideration of the psychological aspect of the actors, or the social, cultural, and environmental context in which the art work takes place. In 1971, Italian semiologist, philosopher, writer, and medievalist Umberto Eco (1932-2016) carried out an in-depth study on semiotics and communication, taking as the main assumption of the communicative process that the sender and the recipient are characterized by different linguistic and cognitive abilities. (Eco 2011)

In this way, the art work and the observer are both the machines of data encoding and decoding of the communicative process but are enriched by the set of linguistic values and meanings that make them fundamental actors of a complex relational system and not just a purely communicative one. Thus, the two main actors end up becoming the true variables of the communicative function. The communication process then develops based on an activism that involves cooperation and mutual interaction. In general, this process is configured as a comparison between mental models (in our case that of the artist who produced the work and the observer), in which the roles of sender and recipient are continuously exchanged. The role of recipient is not passive, either from the point of view of the decryption, or from the point of view of the communication itself.

But the art’s language is not just about communication. According to Rancière:

We can say that there is an act of creation, that there is an art in general, every time this shift of relations between the sensible and its meaning takes place. (...) in our societies, in our universe, in the existing aesthetic regime, which is the form of visibility of art, it happens that there is a specific field that we call "Art". Which is like the area from which to think all these metamorphoses, these shifts. (...) "Art" is in a certain sense the sphere or the name that allows us to give visibility to this set of metamorphosis that produces dissent. (Rancière 2016)

In these words, we can glimpse that the value, and the social purpose, of art that can create a shift, a rift in political thought. He describes politics as “the transformation of the sensory fabric of ‘being together’.” (Rancière 2014:56) So, Rancière conceives politics through an intensely aesthetic filter; thus, it leads to a new distribution of socially configured sensible experience. Rancière argues that moments of “dissent” — conflicts “between two regimes of sense, two sensory worlds” (Rancière
make the possibilities for social change manifest. In that manner, the “aesthetic experience has a political effect. What it produces is no rhetoric persuasion about what must be done. Nor is it the framing of a collective body. It is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world where they live and the way in which they are ‘equipped’ for fitting it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible.” (Rancière 2014:72)

In underlining this political effect, Rancière also carries out a critique of the tradition of artistic criticism. In fact, it tends at the same time to overestimate and underestimate the value of the political potential of art. Basically, it does not really recognize this value. This criticism sees, on the one hand, art as a means of enlightenment and emancipation, through the power to unhinge ordinary perception and experience, thus creating the possibility of realizing an authentic freedom. On the other hand, it recognizes and laments the art’s weak socially transformative powers by hoping for a form of non-mediated social practice — that is, not filtered through traditional art forms. The first error overestimates the political potential of art. Instead, the second error underestimates this potential, ignoring how the dissensus expressed through the art can shape new social possibilities. (Rancière 2015)

In art nowadays, the desire to find a deep connection with the world around us is becoming more and more important. It is trying to make visible relationships, social and daily mechanisms, and discomforts that would otherwise be left with a very weak voice, if not completely mute. Nowadays, art is a tool through which it is possible to fully investigate the identity of an individual or a society. (Bora et al. 2002; Gombrich 2009)

3.2 Disability identity

Defining disability is not simple. In fact, this is one of the most difficult issues to solve, since the concept of disability has undergone many changes over time. What I propose to do here is not to give a univocal definition of disability, which is almost impossible since the concept of disability can be considered fluid rather than purely static. My aim is to give a brief introduction to the so-called social model of disability, thanks to which it is possible to identify the cultural status of disability, and at a later level identify it as an identity.

When one thinks about disability in general, the first image that comes to mind is often that of a person forced into a wheelchair who needs constant help and is commonly at the mercy of the surrounding reality. This image is, in effect, the product of a generalized disinformation, together with the media action that re-proposes it to which we are constantly exposed. In fact, according to Tanya

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\(^5\) Paragraph inspired and developed in part thanks to my previous essay.
Titchkosky, “far from being an individual act, imagining disability is a collective one. Imagination is social—we create images together.” (Titchkosky 2009:76)

In most cases, disability is seen as a problem to be ashamed of, especially if it manifests itself openly, be it physical or mental. Here we have the core of a conflict: the idea that wants people with disability adapted to society. In this way, people with disabilities find themselves in a state of forced silence, in which they cannot express themselves. Further, that makes them invisible. But the fact is, it is not people with disabilities who must adapt, it is the way in which the society listens that must adapt to them.

On closer inspection, reality is much more composite and often different from what we imagine. First, disability can no longer be considered from the medical point of view only: “perspectives have moved from orthodox views of disability, accepted by academic writers, policy makers and service providers, that stressed the problems caused by an individual’s flawed mind or body” (Barnes and Mercer 2004), to a critique of these medicalized and deficit models of disability.

3.2.1 Introducing the social model of disability and culture

In the 1970s, disability activism emerged as a political force worldwide, and a new perspective was promoted for understanding the ways in which the current organisation of society created and perpetuated diverse social barriers to the inclusion of people with impairments. (Finkelstein 1980; Oliver 1990)

At this time the “social model” of disability was born. Conceptualized for the first time by Paul Hunt, it was then developed by Vic Finkelstein and other disabled activists of the UPIAS movement (the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation) during the 1970s (UPIAS, 1976). The theoretical bases of the model were then theorized by scholars such as Mike Oliver, Colin Barnes, and Len Barton. The innovative approach to the study of disability proposed by the social model of disability consists of a sociological type of theorization that aims to overcome the vision of disability as an individual tragedy that happened to an unfortunate minority of the population. As Thomas (1999) has noted, the social model of disability was generated as a result of the efforts of disability activists to identify some fundamental principles to inform their actions. (Riddell and Watson 2014:6-9) The UPIAS produced a document in 1976 entitled Fundamental Principles of Disability. This document set out the following definitions of impairment and disability:

Impairment: ‘lacking all or part of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body.’
**Disability**: ‘the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities.’ (Oliver 1995:22)

Going beyond, not only the idea of disability underwent a change, but also the perception of the civil and moral responsibility of society changed with it:

The social model of disability gives us the words to describe our inequality. It separates out (disabling barriers) from impairment (not being able to walk or see or having difficulty learning). Because the social model separates out disabling barriers and impairments, it enables us to focus on exactly what it is which denies us our human and civil rights and what action needs to be taken. (Morris in Barnes and Mercer 2004)

This is an important change in definition, allowing us to identify that the problem is not disability, but the modes of thinking and response that frame disability as an individual problem. This awareness makes it clear that change cannot be stopped at one level of thought; it must also be implemented on a practical level.

At the same time, while this shift towards the social aspect of disability was observed, in Great Britain a new discipline was developing: disability studies began to properly analyse the various pertinent facets of social, political, historical, and cultural phenomena. Of fundamental importance was the multidisciplinary nature of this research, conducted in a holistic way involving several disciplinary and territorial fields. Besides the variety of addresses and geographical areas, what is clear is the growth of interest in the study of a phenomenon through new theoretical premises that aimed to modify the cultural paradigm through which the concept of disability was interpreted.

According to Siebers, one of the leading scholars in the field of disability studies: “disability is no a pathological condition, only analysable via individual psychology, but a social location complexly embodied.” (Siebers 2008:14) Going further, we could talk about how “disability is not a physical or mental defect but a cultural and minority identity” (Siebers 2008:4). He continues: “identity is neither a liability nor a disability. Nor is it an ontological property or state of being. Identity is, properly defined, an epistemological construction that contains a broad array of theories about navigating social environment.” (Siebers 2008:15) According to another scholar, Allison Ruby Reid-Cunningham, “disability may be considered a culture, culture may be considered a disability, and cultural norms and values influence conceptions of disability” (Reid-Cunningham 2009:99). And further:

anthropologists have determined that the disability is socially constructed: It depends very little on the degree of functional loss or impairment; rather it is defined by societal standards for
normative bodies, behaviours, and role fulfilment. (…) As a result, disability is viewed less as a limitation or dysfunction than as the “perceptions and prejudices of an able-bodied majority” that restrict the independence of people with disabilities (Reid-Cunningham 2009:107).

Thanks to this change of focus, which sees its core in individual experience, disability understood as identity becomes central to disability theory. Siebers (2008) states that “to call disability an identity is to recognize that it is not a biological or natural property but an elastic social category both subject to social control and capable of effecting social change” (Sibers 2008:4).

So, as we see, disability and the people affected by it comprise a vast world of difficult definitions and conceptions. A fluidity exists that certainly does not make open communication easy.

3.2.2 Talking about communication issues

At this point, I would like to focus my attention on one of the key issues on which my research is based: that of miscommunication. With this term I do not intend just to advance a discourse on non-communication in its mathematical model — i.e., when one or more elements that are part of the communication process are missing (Barfield 2000). I also want to highlight how it happens due to the lack of a point of contact or area of shared values between two different realities that are strangers to each other. In this case, talking about “able-bodied” people and those with disabilities, how does the lack of shared values create this non-communication? In her book *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum*, Sonya Loftis ask this question: “If an autistic person and a neurotypical person have a conversation in which a miscommunication occurs, who has caused the miscommunication?” (Loftis 2015:5) Here, Loftis uses terms like “autistic person,” “neurotypical,” and “miscommunication,” but it is important to ask: who holds the power to define miscommunication? More generally, who has the power to define what is normal or abnormal? If these definitions of the normal and abnormal and distinctions between communication and miscommunication are open to challenging and questioning, then the specific subject positions of “autistic” and “neurotypical” are also open to being questioned, rather than to being accepted as self-evident, or common-sense identities.

I believe that these questions speak to the very definition of miscommunication. First, it is easier to recognize miscommunication or misunderstanding when one is outside of a specific context, and this means, I would argue, that a plurality of misunderstandings may exist, with no univocal reality. Second, a further question comes to mind: can one simply assign blame for miscommunication (a blame that seems to be very easy to assign when we speak about people with disability)?

I cannot help but think that considering this miscommunication as a consequence of disability is all a matter of power. As Millett-Gallant argues: “disabled people share and often embody and combat long histories of being exploited and portrayed derogatorily in visual culture, while being
simultaneously shamed, stigmatized, and politically erased” (Millett-Gallant 2010:10). I will explore this power relationship further in Chapter 8.

If we consider disability as an identity, we need to consider the cultural pattern and the set of behaviours involved. I argue that embodiment, including disabled embodiment, can be understood as a matter of perspective, a different point of view according to personal embodied knowledge: the body has knowledge, elaborated by the individual, that reflects cultural backgrounds. I think this is the most crucial point for understanding the relationship between signifier and signified: the signifier can be exactly the same in front of a plurality of viewers, but what counts is how the signified is achieved by the individual, and how much it changes depending on different contexts of reception. Missing this point means that the structure of conversation is destroyed, which is not just an issue about disability: it is the clash between different points of views.

3.3 Art and disability

During the 20th Century, art and artistic expression developed the important themes of self-exhibition and exploration of identity. Experiments took place in which the body also, thanks to the introduction of photography and performance as medium for its representation, became the protagonist of the research process. “Disability studies as a discipline likewise appears on the scene during this period, embodying and critically analysing historical representations of disability” (Millett-Gallant 2010:6).

In the history of art, disability has often been represented both in the final artistic product, but also in the category of artists, in a very long list that demonstrates how the disabled aesthetic has profoundly influenced the history of art and art itself. (Boys 2017:58)

Nowadays, therapeutic meaning is given to the artistic practice of disabled authors, probably due to the juxtaposition of disability/fragility, as if “disabled artists’ works are also approached from restrictive frameworks. Disabled artists are unfortunately often disregarded by the mainstream audience or assumed to express images of so-called suffering and the desire to be ‘normal’. ” (Millett-Gallant 2010:16)

Millett-Gallant argues that “suggesting that disabled people make art strictly for these purposes implies that they are continuously striving to be “healthy” (meaning nondisabled) and in constant states of rehabilitation, rather than expressing through art their identities, knowledge, histories, and so on. (…) Their work may be seen as acts of overcoming their disabilities and therefore forms of therapy and rehabilitation.” (Ibidem) This is a matter not only of the role of disability art itself, but also of a disability aesthetic. Once again Siebers intervened on this topic, affirming the possibility of “establish[ing] disability as a critical framework that questions the presuppositions underlying definitions of aesthetic
production and appreciation.” Nevertheless, fixing this framework is not enough to do justice to disabled art. The true core of this goal is “to establish disability as a significant value in itself, worthy of future development” (Siebers in Boys 2017:58)

3.3.1 Disability aesthetic

Aesthetics tracks the emotions that some bodies feel in the presence of other bodies. This definition of aesthetics (…) posits the human body and its affective relation to other bodies as foundational to the appearance of the beautiful—and to such a powerful extent that aesthetics suppresses its underlying corporeality only with difficulty. (Siebers 2006:63)

With these words, Siebers opens his essay on the disability aesthetic, and a little later highlights how our body is the subject and at the same time the object of aesthetic production: “the body creates other bodies prized for their ability to change the emotions of their maker and endowed with a semblance of vitality usually ascribed only to human beings.” (Siebers 2006)

But all bodies are not created equal when it comes to aesthetic response. Taste and disgust are volatile reactions that reveal the ease or disease with which one body might incorporate another. The senses revolt against some bodies, while other bodies please them. These responses represent the corporeal substrata on which aesthetic effects are based. (Siebers 2006)

Until recently, the concept of disability has been associated above all with the characteristics of weakness of the body and the mind. The impairment of bodily functions or structures (defined, from time to time, as "deformities" or "weaknesses") has always been interpreted as a personal fault, or an instrumental use has been made of them to arouse pietism.

In the most negative stereotypes, disability always coincides with the disease and the subject is considered a body in need of treatments, therapies, and rehabilitative pathways. The extremism of the idea of healing the body from any limitation in bodily functioning leads to not accepting any "imperfection" or "difference," and the disability is rejected by crossing the boundary between self-care and non-acceptance of disability, inasmuch as it denotes an unacceptable difference. The image that has been constructed of people with disabilities has highlighted the limitations, difficulties, and suffering that characterize the presence of a disability: the consequence was exclusion, marginalization, and even concealment.

This perception of disability as weakness affects not only the so-called able-bodied, but also the disabled person, for whom “disability represents a personal catastrophe to be avoided if at all possible, a shameful condition to be denied or hidden if present and negotiated within the sanctuary of one’s family and personal space.” (Stanback 2015:424) Nevertheless, “for others, disability is a source of pride
and empowerment — a symbol of enriched self-identity and self-worth and a central force coalescing a community intent on extolling the fundamental values of life, human rights, citizenship, and the celebration of difference.” (Albrecht, Seelman, and Bury 2001:1-2)

Nowadays, imperfection is sometimes considered generative of a beauty that “will save the world”. Art appropriates this beauty and explores the salvific value generated by disability/fragility, therefore escaping the “predominantly therapeutic use of art” (Seia 2013) that sometimes occurs in environments characterized by the socio-educational paradigm. The aesthetics dimension “includes the ethical dimension and expresses the ability to look, to look at others, to read the scenarios, their evolutions, their actors, to listen”6. (Seia, s.d. 2013:13 in Morelli 2010)

Tobin Siebers has argued that modern art could have adopted a kind of disability aesthetics in the types of embodied forms it has put into cultural circulation. For the modern artist, he claims, “disability acquires aesthetic value because it represents (...) a critical resource for thinking about what a human being is” (Siebers 2010:3).

Modern art has been so successful, I would argue, because it claims disability as a distinct version of the beautiful; it moves us because of its refusal of genius, bodily integrity, and perfect health. (...) Disability aesthetics seeks to emphasize the presence of different bodies and minds in the tradition of aesthetic representation. (Siebers 2010)

3.3.2 The Role Of Disability Arts

At this point, we can introduce the core of my thesis: the role of disability art in helping disabled people explore their identity. For instance, according to Swain and French, the disability art movement in the UK was able to develop a positive group identity for people with disabilities:

Through song lyrics, poetry, writing drama and so on, disabled people have celebrated difference and rejected the ideology of normality in which disabled people are devalued as 'abnormal.' They are creating images of strength and pride, the antithesis of dependency and helplessness. (Swain and French 2000:577-578)

Disability art refers to the development of collective expression of the experience of disability and struggle, along with shared cultural meanings. It entails using art to expose the discrimination and prejudice disabled people face, and to generate group consciousness and solidarity — on the one hand, asserting the value of people with perceived impairment/s, and on the other, refusing to glorify incapacity.

6 Translation by the author
Likewise, Walker describes the importance of the arts in disability culture:

Disability Culture is made up of artists who are not trying to pass, artists who don't buy into societies [sic] rule that we should be ashamed of our disabilities, artists who often show in their art a self-acceptance and a pride about who they are, not in spite of a disability, not because of a disability, but including a disability. (Walker 1998)

Thus, art can be a tool to investigate reality and identity.
4. Enter in the field

"So, the question we should ask ourselves is: why do people need art?"

Christa walked a few steps forward to me while saying these words. We were immersed in a *Never-ending Story* landscape, which was covered by snow and shimmering in the early afternoon sun. It was February 21st, and the previous night it had snowed so much that the whiteness had erased the world around us. We strolled calmly along the ring of roads that surrounds the little town of Bredsjö, sinking in the snow up to mid-calf, regardless of the cold and fascinated by every detail. Christa stopped waiting for me, perhaps believing that I was stuck in the snow. Instead I had been caught by an epiphany: why do people need art?

Of course, this is a question of vast complexity, which touches the most diverse fields of thought and expression of human beings, from philosophy, psychology, and sociology to mathematics and science. Yet along that snowy road, I suddenly seemed to grasp something, a meaning, a faint glimpse just outside my field of vision. *Communication*. Art as a means of communication. Art as a means of investigation. Art as a tool for aggregation. These were the first real ideas that moved me to realize my study, and until shortly before they had been nothing but vague ideas halfway between the artistic field and anthropology.

Indeed, as early as the second half of the twentieth century, some important anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, Mary Douglas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Edmund Leach helped to make the boundaries between different disciplines more fluid. They began to develop the idea that the artistic production, both Western and non-Western, should be considered not simply as a form of applied aesthetics, but as an activity embedded in the social fabric. At the same time, I have always felt these considerations to be placed in a distant, sometimes almost unreachable context (such as that of primitive and tribal art), since "the aesthetic production of a given culture is linked to the values, to the vision of the world and the way, or ways, of feeling that are typical of a certain community." (Morphy and Perkins 2009) What I proposed to do in my study is instead to analyse an ethnographic example of art applied to a close context, such as a social problem that also involves us.

However, the path that led me to the realization of this study has been long and sometimes uneven. What I would like to present in this chapter is precisely that: the beginning of my journey.

4.1 Going on an adventure – the Bredsjö KulturKooperativ

Before starting my actual fieldwork at the KulturParken association, during February 2017 I spent a few days in Bredsjö (a small town located just north of Örebro, in the province of Hälsingland), as a guest with some friends, members of the Bredsjö KulturKooperativ. I want to talk about this experience
because it was a fundamental step for the development of my next work. I think it was a good time for research, even if not actually part of my fieldwork.

The Bredsjö KulturKooperativ is a cultural cooperative that aims to investigate its present with the purpose of highlighting the stories of surrounding people. It is a sustainable society that works through different modes of expression and cultural mergers with the help of public education. Its aim is to promote active participation in society with exchanges and discussions between people from all over the world. The association also has its own theatrical company, which creates shows, courses, and projects of psycho-emotional education. They have carried out the "My Story" project, with which they explored the documentary performing arts. From this project, a book on documentary theatre was born, with the aim of spreading the idea that sharing people’s stories through the arts can help to create a more empathetic world.

My first encounter with the cooperative did not happen that year (2017): in 2012, I took part in a volunteer work camp promoted by SCI (Service Civil International, a non-profit association that promotes intercultural collaboration involving volunteers from around the world). It was my first volunteering experience abroad, and probably was one of the main reasons I decided to return to Sweden. Our daily life as volunteers was divided into two parts: by day we were committed to arranging the actual volunteer work, interrupting us with fika and kitchen team for preparing meals; then in the evening we could try different theatrical exercises and take lessons in new arts (painting, playing bongos, singing). It was a volunteer period of only two weeks, yet it was as intense as a whole month. Subsequently, on my return to Italy I maintained contact with the cooperative, and in summer 2016 I resumed working as a volunteer for Bookloppis, located not far away in Nora. Actually, I can no longer say that it is only a "working" relationship, so to speak, since I have developed friendships with many members of this association, as well as with the same volunteers and travel companions with whom I shared those two weeks in 2012.

This are the reasons why I wanted to go back to this little reality once again: to meet friends, of course, but also to share and exchange opinions on the subject of my research. It must be said that at the time I still did not have a precise idea of where this study would take me, and indeed these days were fundamental for its subsequent development. (Bernard 2011:67-68; Davies 2002:32-38)

I had arrived in Bredsjö that Friday, 17th February, after a journey made up of rails, buses, and exchanges. They had brought me from the village of Tobo - just north of Uppsala - to this other town in central Sweden. Once I arrived at the station of Örebro, I found Christa waiting for me. Christa comes from Germany: we met for the first time during the volunteering work camp in summer 2012, and in spring 2013 she was back for good.
My plan was to stay for a couple of weeks in the house of Luc and his son Jim, where Christa currently lives, and to meet the members of Bredsjö KulturKooperativ again. Luc is a special person, who could be called a sort of migratory bird. He has been part of the association for some years now, but despite having a home in the city, he often returns to Brussels, where he and Jim are originally from. Being back in this place was an interesting experience. On the one hand it awakened pleasant memories (Luc’s house is the same one where we were hosted as volunteers in 2012); on the other it caused mixed feelings, like wonder and freezing. Things that contributed to this were the faulty heating, a hole in the kitchen wall adjacent to the living room where I slept (with only a curtain to separate them), and the Swedish winter outside the frozen windows. In this environment, I discovered that I had two best friends: tea and wool blankets, the rough ones that are annoying, but which do their dirty job. I believe that this comes within the range of unexpected situations that one must be able to face during the course of fieldwork. (Davies 2002)

However, apart from cold, the Bredsjö experience proved to be interesting and stimulating, as well as decisive for the further development of my thoughts related to my research topic. On one very interesting and productive day we organized a fika, Luc, Jim and Christa and some other neighbours and friends (Affe and Ida). In truth, the fika was an idea to spend time together on a particularly cold Sunday. The situation was cosy and definitely relaxed: it was very difficult to speak about art, philosophy, and communication. (Bernard 2011:164) However, between games of jenga, Austrian sweets made with raisin pancakes and apple puree, and litres (litres!) of mint tea, I also managed to start the conversation about my interests. During our discussion, which I would call an informal interview, various interesting issues related to art and artistic expression came out:

- The strong connection between art and politics, or art created by politics;
- The importance of purpose: art must have a purpose, a thought behind it that in a certain sense legitimizes it as art;
- Art should be an expression of the self, the voice of the social;
- Art’s purpose changes when the economy, the market, gets in the way and art can no longer be free;
- At the same time to say that art must be free is another way to force it;
- Art can and must play a pedagogical role within the community.

During this same conversation, some questions of a much more abstract type arose, such as: how do we recognize – or define – what is artistic and distinguish it from what is not? How and how much art should be free? Free from what? However, this is not the most appropriate place to examine these types of questions, which are extremely difficult and sometimes evasive. What has been interesting is the continuous return, almost insistence, on the last item on the list: the formative role of art.
However, the moment of the day that made me think more was not this conversation during the *fika*. It came later, when our guests were gone and I was helping Christa bring the dishes to the sink. She had not said a word all afternoon, but now, in that recovered intimacy, she confessed to me (probably with a nuance of criticism):

"When I hear these speeches for me they are always difficult and strange, too abstract and philosophical..."

I remember a long moment of silence between us, before she added "the real problems are others."

It seemed strange to me that a statement like that came from one of those same people who work with art. In fact, Christa is more of a concrete person, who loves working with solid, tangible materials that have their own feel, colour, weight. Perhaps talking about art on a purely conceptual level is not really her mode, while it is the concreteness of the artistic product that fascinates her. It is totally different from the elusiveness of the emotion experienced on the moment, which cannot be stopped on canvas or forced into marble. I mean the complex concretization of the *here and now* that takes place in the theatrical process.

I believe art has always been a mirror of society, but it is so whether or not it follows the market. We need to shift our point of view, from aesthetic and monetary values to intrinsic and conceptual ones. This intrinsic value also represents the *here and now* of artistic work, as Benjamin Walter says, in his *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*: “The hic et nunc of the work of art - its unique existence is unrepeatable in the place where it is located” (Benjamin 2008:8). Society, the context, the market of course — all of these aspects will compose the frame in which we can portray the society of that moment. If we do so, we can recognize the communicative value of art.

Art is not an end in itself. Art is something present and alive, that actively influences the surrounding reality. Christa has said: "the real problems are others." But the thing is: art can see these problems; artists can talk about them; they can find solutions. That is why I finally chose theatre as a field of study: thanks to the performative aspect that unites body, mind, and feeling, the theatre becomes essence and representation of the *here and now* of which Benjamin speaks.

**4.2 Meeting the crew – the KulturParken association**

Sometime later, on February 27th, I had the first contact with the reality of the KulturParken cooperative. I had already had a phone conversation with Nanna, the director, who immediately proved to be enthusiastic about my research. In truth, I think there was an initial misunderstanding because of language barriers and her homework commitments (probably something escaped from the context and
was transfigured into something else). (Bernard 2011:171) Only later was I able to explain my research question more clearly, which I must admit at the time was still quite nebulous even for me. However, Nanna has proved to be even more enthusiastic.

The theatrical rehearsal venue is located just outside Uppsala, in the south hinterland, near Gottsunda but remote. To get there, one needs to go through several secondary roads that unravel in the woods and fields, still snowy at the moment. For this reason, when I went down for the first time at the Lurbo bus stop, I found Sara waiting for me in a grey metallic car. As I approached her, challenging the high snow, I discovered that Nathalie – another girl in the company – had been on the bus with me. There was a moment of embarrassment, we could clearly perceive it, as we both got into the car, after hurriedly presenting ourselves.

I remember that at that moment I was anxious and tense as a violin string. I was no longer in the safe mooring of Bredsjö KulturKooperativ, with its familiar aftertaste that reassured me and allowed me a margin of action that I already known, where I knew how to move and what potential actions/reactions I might meet. This was an unexplored territory, and I had no maps. (Bernard 2011:307; Davies 2002:68-69)

The first to break the silence was Sara, who spoke to me directly in English before I had the chance to tell her how stunted my Swedish was at the time. She asked me how I felt and exactly what I was studying. She had a sunny smile that, as I would find out even better later, had the power to reassure anyone in any situation. Nathalie, in the back seat, looked at the phone, but I could understand from the stealthy glances that she threw me that she was somehow studying me. She asked me something in Swedish and Sara translated for me: she wanted to know where I came from.

As soon as they both found out I am Italian, the rest of the conversation was downhill, not even a hint of Swedish anymore. We talked about food (because it is always good to start from stereotypes), of Milan and its cathedral. Did I miss my city? What was I advised to visit? The attention was all about me, and even when I tried to ask them questions, about Sweden maybe, in one way or another we were talking about my Italianness again. Was this a sort of cultural clash? (Davies 2002:68-69)

After about twenty minutes, we finally arrived at the rehearsal site. At the same time a taxi arrived with a rear platform. Shortly thereafter, Lukas came down from there, sitting on a powered wheelchair and muffled up to his ears in a scarf. Sara promptly joined him, to help him move the Permobil in the snow. The first glance that Lukas launched towards me from under his hat was a mixture of curiosity and suspicion, as if I were a foreign body whose origin or meaning he could not understand. Only some time later, with the help of Sara who translated everything that was said in Swedish - which
Lukas speaks only and strictly - I realized that his feeling was curiosity, but what I had caught as suspicion was in some sense amazement.

The venue was a small house, almost a nest, and it was typically Swedish in its red colour. Once inside, the first thing that struck me was the smell of coffee. In front of the entrance, where shoes are taken off and coats hung, bordered by a corner sofa, the actual rehearsal space opened up: highlighting the division was a change in the floor, from linoleum to parquet. On the left there was a small kitchen with red shutters: Ellinor was fumbling with the kettle to make tea. The walls of the entire room were white, except for that hint of red in the "canteen area". As for the parquet, it seemed to mean "here is a different place … not yet inside but even more not outside." We had entered a different space from the foreign world, even if not yet part of the real creative process. From two large windows in the rehearsal area it was possible to see the outside fields, which were also white with snow. The light in there was intense, almost dazzling.

Nanna welcomed me immediately, energetic and cheerful. She introduced me to the rest of the group, who had taken a seat at the table, where butter, bread and fruit were arranged in preparation for breakfast. For a moment, I felt as if I had been put into a window. I saw several pairs of eyes peering at me, studying me. It frightened me a little, until I realized that for them I was the one who scrutinized: they did not yet know the reason I was there, but they knew that one thing I wanted to do was to dig in their lives. Perhaps this intimidated them more than I did. I took a long moment to observe them. They were a nice crew.

Nanna (44 years; the director of the company) was born in Uppsala, but up to age 11 she lived in Panama and in Spain. She has a careful look, the kind that I have already had the opportunity to meet in the theatre operators that I joined during my artistic career. It is the gaze of those who can grasp every detail, who can gather the "unsaid."

Sara (Swedish; actress and assistant director) is tall and slender. As I said, she has a smile that lights up her face. She gives me the idea of the kind of person who always looks for the positive aspect of things and encourages others to do the same.

Of Ellinor (Swedish; 49 years old; actress), the first thing I can say is that she is colourful. There is so much colour in her clothes, in her hair, and also in the way she moves. She has two bright eyes and an energetic way of moving. She loves to sing, and she taught me several Swedish traditional songs.

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7 Given the delicate nature of the topics covered and the sensibility of some of my informants, for now I decided to use pseudonyms to introduce them. Perhaps this could change after sharing the research results with the KulturParken members.
On first impression, Nathalie (Swedish, 36 years old, with ADHD diagnosis) always seemed distracted to me. Always a bit apart from what happens around her, with her cell phone that initially she seemed to use as a shield. She has a soft body, which sometimes hinders her, but she is always well turned out, almost fashionable – she really loves fashion and shopping. Only later I will understand her disruptive personality, with a little diva attitude.

Lukas (Swedish, 42 years old) is the most enigmatic of the actors. He has CP (cerebral palsy), so he uses a Permobil to move around in the environment. He requires someone's help (usually Sara) even for seemingly simple actions such as eating. His extraordinary energy can be grasped from the first glance.

Magnus (Swedish), one of the project leaders as well as theatre operator and pedagogist, is a calm, kind person who inspires trust. He deals with the administrative part of the project, but also with the management of the workshops and the teaching part.

Nanna introduced me in Swedish, explaining who I was and what I was going to do there with them. I saw their curiosity grow, while the hostility receded. Coffee was offered to me. At this point the general atmosphere had changed: it was much more relaxed, and the electricity in the air a moment before had completely disappeared. I was still struggling to get involved in the conversation, since it was almost entirely in Swedish, except when Nanna, Sara or Magnus addressed me directly. With the others it was a trial move, talking slowly and waving our hands to mimic what we wanted to mean or understand, often and willingly coming to nothing. The conversations, if we can call them that, ended very quickly, with embarrassed smiles on both sides. However, it was a pleasant situation, during which we shared coffee and sandwiches with butter. Ah, the power of food: perhaps more than anything else it is able to unite people. (Tosi 2011; Fine and Corte 2017)
5. Talking trough the body

On the first day I arrived at the KulturParken house, fearful and lacking confidence in front of the company’s members, I was invited to take an active part in the final activity of the day (this was after a day of observation from my safe space, perched on top of the sofa). It was a circle of sharing, a typical exercise in the world of contemporary theatre, especially in those schools of thought where theatre serves as a tool of investigation of oneself and others. The basic idea was simple but complex in its execution, especially considering the different physicality of each person. I was sitting between Nathalie and Lukas. We were asked to recall an object dear to us and then to “create” it in our hands without describing it verbally. We had to transmit aspects such as its form, consistency, size, weight, softness, etc. We had to make it as real as possible, and then pass it on to the next person, who in turn would have to make it real, before passing it on. The process ended when the object came back to the rightful owner, always the same and yet different, transformed in its essence from that journey of hands.

If at a first level this exercise may seem like a simple practice of mime, a training in the abstraction, dexterity, and expression that are fundamental elements of the theatre, on a deeper level it is an exercise of trust, respect, and building relationships. Taking the object dear to us from the Platonic world of ideas, making it present in its immateriality, and passing it to the next as an Olympic torch was like we were passing a piece of us. No longer an intangible object, it was a material sentiment that, like a witness, was given away, transported, weighed, contemplated, and then yielded again. I realized later that what Nanna - with great foresight - proposed to do served to fit me better into the group and to make me equal to the members of the company, as if I were not just an external observer but part of the project in progress.

This is a first example of theatrical exercises in which the body becomes a bearer of a knowledge that is initially only ours but thanks to the act of sharing becomes also of the other. In this chapter I want to present the observations I made within the KulturParken association – showing also my direct experience of embodied knowledge and learning, during which I myself became a research tool. I do so to answer the following questions: how does the body become an instrument of investigation? How can theatrical performance help the communication process?

5.1 The body as a tool of investigation and communication

Before moving on to the exposition of the ethnographic data that I collected, I will first explain what I mean by the concept of the body as an instrument of investigation, to make the following discourse more understandable. Embodied knowledge develops from the personal experience of the individual. This is the main reason why the body can be effective as a research tool: through sensorial experience we can interact with the surrounding space and develop knowledge about it. Using the word
“surrounding.” I refer of course to the physical environment, but also to the web of relationships, connections, and communication that we develop just by being in the same environment. It is possible to recognize the relationship between the psyche and the environment that leads humans to be reflected in the latter, since “the body is at the same time the original tool with which humans shape their world and the substance out of which the world is shaped.” (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:12) But the sensorial experience of the body is not related to the outside only; it is also connected to the inside.

We can introduce here the idea of the body as a symbolic place and see how the phenomenology of experiences (Merleau-Ponty 2013; Landgrebe Ludwig 1973) is related to this symbolism of the body. In artistic performance, the body is used by the artists to probe the experiences of the human being and to investigate the productive forces of the unconscious. It is also used to understand how the unconscious shows itself outside of the human being and to explore its connection with the outside world. This double exploration, of the inside and the outside, is a whole that combines to seek one’s identity. It is therefore a fluid identity, subject to change as well as interpretation. Like identity, artistic performance is fleeting, never fixed. Every time it is repeated, it changes, and it will never be like the previous one. It develops and grows. This shared fluidity is why I believe we can say that the artistic expression of performance can be considered the most effective representation of one’s identity.

According to Turner, "the basic stuff of social life is performance, the presentation of self in everyday life. Self is presented through the performance of roles, through performance that breaks roles, and through declaring to a given public that one has undergone a transformation of state and status, been saved or damned, elevated or released.” (Turner 1986:36) Performance is a territory in which it is possible to represent the self, breaking the driving forces of the ego, and reflecting a psychoanalytical dimension as well. Alongside the psychological dominance of the ego and the unconscious in performance, we also find themes related to body language, which can develop into gender policies or as in our case, disability art and culture.

I believe that it is precisely in its being a symbolic place that artistic practice allows us to overcome the cultural gaps that may result from the clash/meeting of different points of view (these latter being understood as different cultural patterns and behavioural sets). In fact, according to Peirce, “a man is capable of a spiritual consciousness, which constitutes him one of the eternal verities, which is embodied in the universe as a whole. This as an archetypal idea can never fail; and in the world to come is destined to a special spiritual embodiment.” (Peirce 1998:3) As we have seen, especially regarding embodying a particular point of view, an individual can only try to imagine the experience of being someone or something else. (Nagel 1974) However, when we speak of being as a symbol, or archetype, here the distance that seemed unattainable before may somehow be diminished. The strong
presence of embodied knowledge within the inner process of theatrical work is the reason why it can be so effective in the communication process.

5.2 Create an archive…

In some way, the artistic process of rehearsal coincides with the 2nd phase of the ritual, in a space that Turner defines as liminoid. (Turner 1988) We will explore this ritual phase further in the next chapter. For now, the important aspect to point out is that this phase is a creative and experimental moment in which the body becomes fundamental for the creation and development of the character, and consequently as a means of expression. This development happens thanks to the different theatrical research and improvisation exercises the actors can experiment with during the creative evolution of a theatrical show. According to Italian director and theatrical anthropologist Eugenio Barba:

The exercises are small labyrinths that the body-mind can travel and retrace to incorporate in a paradoxical way, to distance itself from its daily actions and move into the extra-daily field of the scene. The exercises are similar to being completed successfully, but to derive a certain quality of energy. An exercise is made of memory, memory of the body. An exercise becomes memory that acts through the whole body. (Barba 1990)  

Thus, the body develops memory, improving its embodied knowledge and making our inner archive grow and grow. I present below some of this exercises and development that I witnessed during my time at the association.

5.2.1 The Music and the Dance

In artistic research involving the use of the body, dance is the most essential practice, being fundamental in its simplicity. There is a sacred aspect to the dance, a meditative and transcendent value, which I think of as almost cathartic. Let us see this performative practice in more detail.

Destiny is the official choreographer of KulturParken company. In addition to the choreographing the shows, she takes care of the physical exercises held during the rehearsals. They are of great importance for the use of the body as an instrument. They make it a means of investigation, while developing its expressive power. In her research method, Destiny uses a sort of extractive procedure, which starts from an inner discovery and moves to an exterior expression.

I did not meet her immediately, in fact a couple of weeks passed before our first meeting. The day she was there I immediately felt something different in the air, like a kind of sparkling wind around us. Maybe it was just the cold of mid-March, but I think it was also Destiny: a concentration of energy

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8 Translation from Italian by the author.
and creativity, like a small tornado. That day the rehearsal was slightly different from the usual scheme (see Chapter 2), and we skipped the usual technical rehearsal before lunch. After the usual warm-up exercises, Destiny took control of the ship. Everyone had to participate, even Nanna, Magnus, and me. Initially we moved without music, freely letting our body do what it wanted. “Where does movement come from?” Destiny asks. I had already come across a similar exercise in clowning school in Milan: we called it no-control, and was the basis of our circus and theatrical performances. Basically, one lets everything go and moves according to every gesture, even the strangest. However, if it may seem that this exercise is just a loss of control without limits, it is not. What happens, in fact, is the awareness of one's limits, usually more distant than what we had expected from ourselves, and the desire to overcome them even more. If done with the right presence of mind and body, ”one can also feel invincible” after such exercises (Ellinor).

Then the music took over and something changed: the movements that previously seemed to make no sense now became more fluid, almost calculated but spontaneous at the same time. If before we had journeyed within ourselves to find the movement - along with the feeling that such movement arouses and/or vice versa - now we put that movement at the service of expression. What do we want to say, or show, thanks to that movement? As Destiny asserted, “this is the question we must ask ourselves when we create choreography.”

In fact, I followed the exercise halfway: with the body I danced, but with my eyes I tried to catch as much detail as possible. It might seem obvious, and even a little stereotypical and prejudicial, that I would focus mostly on Lukas. On the other hand, dancing on a Permobil could seem almost impossible. However, despite being fascinated by the simplicity with which Lukas was able to move and make sense of the dance, I must confess that my attention was captured by Nathalie. In watching her during the rehearsals and comparing her with other daily moments of the day, I realized the diversity of her movements: she was usually confident in her attitudes, but became more timid once on the practice scene. I am not sure how much this was influenced by my presence, since although I was close to the theatrical practice and more and more part of their group, I was still a stranger. But the day of the dance, her movements were beautiful, fluid, and clean, demonstrating a presence and coexistence of mind and body as I had never seen in her. It was as if the dance had broken down every self-imposed barrier, allowing her to no longer fear the judgment and the idea of incapacity that sometimes afflicted her.

5.2.2 Character development

If the dance can be perceived as something instinctive and in a certain way primordial, the construction of characters should be a little more practical. It can start from an instinctive spark, but then it must move towards a more codified, more rational status.
Nanna confirmed my thoughts on this, citing the use of a milder version of the Stanislavski\(^9\) method. Each character in the show presents a behaviour or an expression, that belongs to the actor who interprets it. Ellinor and Kim, Nathalie and Gunhild, Lukas and Mårten, Sara and Moa, all share a little secret, a connection that makes them the same entity. The characters are born thanks to a process that we could see as similar to the one used by Destiny in the dance development: from inside to outside. Usually it starts from movement: for example, the walking exercise, during which the actor confronts the surrounding space and experiments through different types of steps and gaits, until finding the one that best represents what he or she wants to communicate. The script itself is born through this process: from phrases, thoughts, and reflections on the topic of sexuality that the actors have expressed in the first person, but that perhaps already were the embryo of those same characters born on an unconscious level.

I think the creation of characters and scripts through inside-out development is an important process when applied to disability because it can bring to light thoughts, emotions, and opinions that are not always clearly expressed or even lived freely, just because of the social context that encloses/closes them. From this point of view, I believe that the most emblematic character is that of Mårten. It is an authoritarian character, sometimes despotic, who does not lose the opportunity to assert his power over others. During the play are moments such as the following, in which Mårten shows us this side of his personality:

M: KIM! You should clean here! This is a daily activity and not a kindergarten!\(^{10}\) – Scene I

Or again:

K: boss! Can Moa start work here?
M: Does she want to work here?
K: yes! Does she get it?
M: no! \(^{11}\) - Scene III

\(^9\) The Stanislavski method is a style of acting teaching developed at the beginning of the 20th century by Konstantin Sergeyev Stanislavsky, who usually called it *psychotechnics*. The method is based on the psychological deepening of the character and on the search for affinity between the inner world of the character and that of the actor. It is based on the externalization of inner emotions through their interpretation and reworking on an intimate level. The great processes that underlie the interpretation are two: that of personification and that of reviviscence. The process of personification starts from muscle relaxation to continue with the development of physical expressiveness, the setting of the voice, the logic and coherence of physical actions, and external characterization. The reviviscence process starts from the functions of imagination and continues with the division of the text into sections, with the development of attention, the elimination of clichés, and the identification of tempo-rhythm. Reviviscence is fundamental because everything that is not relived remains inert, mechanical, and inexpressive.

\(^{10}\) Translation by the author.

\(^{11}\) Translation by the author.
However, Lukas is not like that. How much is the authoritarianism of his character the reflection of a will towards autonomy, or even of real power, which in everyday life is denied?

It is also at this stage that the educational intent of the KulturParken theatre is manifested, as shown in this declaration on their website:

The KulturParken had the opportunity to develop methods based on experience and drama-education to work with sexuality and relationships with people with intellectual disabilities. (...) We believe that all people learn better from concrete experiences, in which both the brain and the body and emotions are included. Our method is theatrical and dramatic interactive teaching, combined with conversation and process exercises. We want those who participate with their full essence to learn more, think and try out different questions about sexuality, body, relationships and emotions. – Jag har lust!

Through the creative process of brainstorming and analysis, the resolution of tasks or the performance of the same acting exercises, the actors-explorers can experience what it feels like to live in a certain way, how to express a feeling, or how to experiment and act in a certain situation.

5.2.3 The mask

The mask is another important aspect of theatrical practice that is deeply connected to the characters’ development. I believe it is also a good example of the sharing point of view that I think is the basis of theatrical communication.

One day, shortly after the closing fika of the day, I was able to talk about theatrical media together with Ellinor. I was still sipping my coffee in the red kitchen of the association, with the sweet smell of the oven-baked kanellbullar that lingered in the air, when Ellinor asked me if I wanted to join her for an upcoming workshop in Uppsala. Unfortunately, I had to decline, since the whole two-day event would have been Swedish only, and my communication skills at that time were decidedly poor. However, this was a great expedient to start discussing art and theatre.

We continued to talk a bit about the workshop: it was a two-day study of introspective theatrical techniques and the use of masks. Sometimes, "the theatrical mask” can be a misleading concept: if on the one hand this term indicates the physical object of the mask that hides the face, in the theatre instead it shows it. The concept was born from the Greek theatre, when the actors used to wear masks that magnified their faces, so that all of the spectators could see it clearly. However, in doing so, the expression crystallized, becoming the mask. Nowadays the use of real masks is not necessary, but often we can see performances that make extensive use of them. (Bosisio 1995) What matters is what the
concept of mask represents: an emotion, more or less codified, that the actor displays while performing the double action is investigated in itself and shown to the public.

As well as the fun part of being an actor, Ellinor told me, this was one of the most fascinating aspects of the theatre for her: "The mask fascinates me. Being always yourself, but at the same time someone else." "Because," she said with a serious look, "the mask is not a mask". Pushing us further into the conversation, Ellinor explained that from her point of view the mask is a research tool that leads you to "be another to understand the other," incorporating realities and emotions.

“You must be something you are not to understand something that you do not usually feel. Or maybe you feel, but you don’t know. This is theatre for me and that's why I do it: to understand what I don’t know. (...) I think the purpose of the theatre is to reveal, to teach. The fourth wall is not a boundary, it is a possibility.”—Ellinor

5.3 …and put it on the stage.

Here I would like to briefly present the differences and similarities that I noticed between the actors during the rehearsals and their own characters on stage during the Premiere. In some cases, it is an interesting evolution that underlines what I just said through Ellinor's words: an evolution that involves the actors and makes them become someone else, someone whom perhaps had never thought of becoming.

This reminds us also of what Siebers states about the role of the body in disability art: “the body creates other bodies prized for their ability to change the emotions of their maker and endowed with a semblance of vitality usually ascribed only to human beings.” (Siebers 2006)

Gunhild – Nathalie

Gunhild has long, coppery, smooth hair, a beautiful white dress that goes down to the ankles, and bare feet. I have already mentioned Nathalie’s abundant self-confidence, but during rehearsals she sometimes stumbled in moments of embarrassment, with sometimes awkward movements due perhaps also from her own body (Nathalie is a very beautiful, but a bit curvy). In fact, this was one of the points to which Nanna was paying close attention during the rehearsal: the precision of the movement and what the character wanted to communicate with it. Sometimes Nathalie seemed to surrender to the failure of an action; other times she became infamed and stubborn until the movement was perfect. Yet on the evening of the Premiere, Nathalie owned the stage. Even the most daring gestures were intense and not lost, sure and not shy (i.e., talking about pleasure with Kim, when she asks her in which point of the body Gunhild felt it, she grabs herself between the legs and exclaims "Här!")

Gunhild managed to bring out that audacity that perhaps sometimes was missing from Nathalie.
Kim - Ellinor
Kim has black, short hair hidden by a black woollen hat, and a soft but harmonious body bundled up in work clothes. Ellinor’s disruptive personality is immediately apparent, even in her stage presence. Her relationship with the stage shows her great passion and desire to explore the world of theatre (always wants to update through workshops and laboratories, and she reads and researches constantly). From this point of view, Ellinor was very technical and precise right from the first rehearsal I witnessed. On stage, she shows a great intensity and depth of character.

Mårten - Lukas
Mårten is always dressed in black, almost as if to recall the image of the funeral office, as well as his name. On the stage Lukas is master of himself. He has an incredible expressive ability that in my opinion makes him a great actor. His character presents a deep evolution during the show, and he does not fail to show every nuance. The Permobil itself, which is used with mastery, succeeds in this intent, emphasizing Mårten’s states of mind.

Moa – Sara
Moa, the young girl in love with Kim, has shoulder-length brown hair, and is dressed a little punk, with a short skirt and a black shirt. Sara was very natural and spontaneous during the rehearsal, and this spontaneity is also seen in Moa. She is a calm, patient and positive character, just like Sara.

5.4 Education and awareness
Going further into the exploration of the body as a tool of investigation, I want to present here two of the workshops from the conference “Jag Har Lust!”, which took place from 24th to 26th October 2017 at the Uppsala Konsert & Kongress centre. My aim here is to underline the educational goal of the association and the importance of the theatrical work in this context.

Theatre and relationships
The first workshop I attended was also the most interesting. In fact, it was a sort of lesson on how to deal with a first approach to another person and eventually to flirt, with an initial focus on the feelings that this raises on an individual and personal level, so as to move on the collective emotions of the group that is created. Of interest was the use of different theatrical exercises as a means of exploration and codification of these actions and the resulting emotions created. Another interesting thing: Minina was with us. Who is Minina? She is the life-size doll always presents on the scene of “Sagan om Liv och Lust”. She is part of the set design, yet also an actress. She is both a means of communication and a kind of confident for the other characters. She is inanimate, but she is at the centre of the relationships between the characters, which is why I refer to her as "she." Even in this case, she was our traveling companion.
Holding the workshop was Magnus, whom I had met during the rehearsals for "Sagan om Liv och Lust". First, there was a circle of presentation. As we will see in Chapter 6th in talking about the ritual of the theatre, this circle has more than a practical purpose. It represents the first passage or border place: from there onwards we are in the liminal space where the change is free to manifest itself. It is where the pre-existing reality changes, creating something different and new. When one leaves this liminal space, he/she will no longer be the same.

During the circle, all of the 12 participants, myself included, presented themselves briefly by talking about their work, daily life, and reason they were in that room. It was interesting to note the variety of people: teachers, traders, taxi drivers, cooks, unemployed, students of different ages and gender. However, everyone was there with the same will to understand how to have a healthy relationship with others. I wondered what makes a healthy relationship, whether it is the responsibility of the individual only or if it involves society at a deeper level.

Later, the real workshop started. It was a matter of several basic theatrical exercises, like walking around the room occupying all the space, then slowly starting to perceive the presence of others, changing your pace to get in tune with them, then suddenly meeting and for a second, the time of a breath, looking into each other's eyes. It's a relatively simple exercise, yet from experience I know it can be very tiring. After going around like crazy balls around the room, that connection and moment of visual contact means "I see you." Speaking with Magnus about this thought, we agreed that in fact that moment is not just "I see you"; it is "I recognize you," which is the fundamental aspect of the exercise. Subsequently, the exercises were a variant of this first one, in which more complex gestures were introduced, such as the handshake, the embrace, and so on. Everyone's feelings were always considered: if someone admitted that something was too much, others had the task of understanding it, accepting it and acting accordingly.

What role did Minina play in all this? At first, she was only a spectator, seated on a chair a little apart. Then a plump girl, dressed in black, with long red-brown hair and a beautiful bonnet hat, took her gently in her arms and brought her into the group as if she wanted to make her dance. I believe that at that moment Minina symbolized someone who is helpless, who cannot speak or defend herself. Because she has no power to express herself, she must be treated with greater care, recognizing her needs, limits, and feelings. Basically, Minina was the archetype of those people to whom the conference was dedicated: people with disabilities.

As had happened during the rehearsals of the show, I could not assume the passive attitude of the observer on this occasion, and this was in both cases the best moment of data collection. As I wandered around the room, almost crawling against the walls so as not to interfere with the exercises in progress, a tall, thin girl with long brown hair pointed at me, as if she had decided I was her white whale.
She stood in front of me, forcing myself to lower the barrier of the camera: it was one of the most beautiful, deep, and involving encounters I have ever experienced. Thanks to the theatrical exercise, the border between me and the other person was almost cancelled. Of course, a distance remains, as it should be, but at the same time all of those barriers imposed by a different cultural background, a different story, and a different set of beliefs and behaviours, collapsed and the moment our eyes came into contact there was no need to add anything else, either with words or gestures. The worlds of meaning and signifier merged, making the approach and communication fluid and free of obstacles. Here the teaching purpose was achieved thanks to this theatrical practice.

**Dance as a mean of cohesion**

I took part in this workshop on the second day of the conference, so I could assist with it from beginning to end. As a photographer, I could not be involved this time, because the dance included a relationship in pairs, which once performed became a choral message. The teacher was again Destiny, and Lukas also attended the workshop.

The dance movements were fairly simple and natural, although sometimes there was a dramatic charge. The participants stood in the now-empty main conference hall. The chairs were against the side, but the sheets still hung on the walls, with the arms of the white heart symbolizing the spectacle of the KulturParken stretching towards the dancers. Then the couples formed. There is a moment of turmoil when actions of this kind take place during dance or theatre. When the educator exclaims "form couples!" in a thundering voice you never know whom to go with, especially if you find yourself in a room with new people, with whom you will attempt to reach a moment of communion (as dance embraced can be). I saw the embarrassment, while for a second the room froze. Mistrust. Perhaps difficulties letting go. Fleeting glances — *stay away, I do not know what you want from me*. Miscommunication. Then something is destroyed, like an embankment that breaks. Everyone flows towards a partner as if he or she had always been there just for that. All of this happens in the fraction of a few seconds, but I see it as a slow motion, since it is a feeling that I know well and that I can recognize on other faces.

The dance turned out to be a sort of pantomime: a first approach, a refusal, a second attempt, stubbornness, disappointment, a return to one's own steps, and finally reconciliation (or the first real encounter?). A simple story, seen and reviewed, yet so complex in its cyclic nature. For some of the participants this is just a game, a fun trick, but for others it is an incredibly deep action. During the rehearsals without music, in which only the steps are explained repeatedly to make them obvious and almost mechanical, everything runs smoothly, and everyone is like schoolchildren excited to make a good impression. When the music resounds in the air, something changes. After having tried the choreography a couple of times, just to synchronize all the participants, Destiny declares: "the next one
is the official one!” The laughter dies suddenly and the air becomes charged with waiting. Something changes between and in the participants: the border with the liminal space has been crossed.

All are utterly concentrated and fully present in the moment, while the dance staged. Perhaps it is due to the circularity of the dance, which is repeated for several minutes in the same set of actions, with the encore that leads to an interiorization of the gesture, but also of its meaning. Perhaps it is a kind of meditation. But something changes. Destiny makes a movement and invites the others to repeat it. People follow her movement like a wave. Then another movement comes inside, and the wave follows. Then another, and another. Movement, wave, movement, wave. Everyone makes their own choreography and the others start to repeat it. Destiny steps out from the dance, leaving the participants alone. They do not need her guidance to follow the movement or the choreography, because there is no choreography. This is exactly what the dance is about: free expression and self-evolution.

5.5 The day I became a doll

During the period in which I witnessed the rehearsals of the show “Sagan om Liv och lust” I was never just an observer. I think this is one of the distinctive aspects of the work of smaller associations that often rely on volunteering: even if you do not have a crucial role, you are involved in every operation. So often I found myself not only a researcher, but also a stage assistant, lighting and music clerk, photographer, and substitute on a day when someone was missing from the rehearsals (acting in Swedish for the first time was ... illuminating). No wonder then that occasionally I took an active part in the show. We also tried a couple of experiments to insert myself into the real final product (without success). Two particular occasions caught my attention that I believe are important and useful for my dissertation, since they show how I was able to create the previously mentioned symbolic space where it is possible to combine different perspectives and perceptions.

The first has again to do with dance. During a day of rehearsals, I was invited to take part in an experiment. It was about dancing with Lukas - and of course with his Permobil - and seeing how a person completely unrelated to the situation would relate to that act. I will be honest: in the beginning it was a disaster. I was strongly blocked by the presence of the Permobil. I felt it as a foreign and limiting element. I wondered: how can we waltz like this? I confess that I am ashamed of these thoughts. During the rehearsal I tried to change my way of dealing with the situation: my intent was to see the Permobil not as an obstacle, but as a sort of extension of the two of us. I tried to apply what Charles Sanders Peirce calls “social consciousness.” I am aware that this is not the way in which the Permobil object is universally perceived, and of course I speak only from my experience, but changing my point of view changed my perception of my body, the body of the other, and of the space around us. And we danced a waltz. I think this is an example of rediscovery of reality, thanks to which we can perceive the reality that surrounds us, and to which we are always accustomed, through a new pair of glasses, so to speak.
Thus, the reality itself seems new to us, as if we had never seen or experienced it before. I believe that this idea of “rediscovery of the reality” is really interesting when used with the aim of building new relationships and, by extension, building community.

Moreover, it is time for us to meet Minina again. As we have seen, in her interaction with the other characters, Minina helps them in their personal research. In this case it was based on interpersonal relationships, on verbal and non-verbal communication, and on the discovery of one's own body and that of the other. On the scene Minina speaks, dances, and is loved. This is what happened when I tried to be Minina myself.

After several rehearsals in which I was present as a spectator, I was invited to take the place of this life-sized doll placed on the stage, with which the actors would have to interact in different ways. Beyond the difficulty of not knowing exactly what would happen on the scene, and therefore not knowing what to expect, what really challenged me was having to be the doll. As such, I had to cease to have a sensitive and conscious body. I had to somehow convince myself of the non-sensory nature of my body. My body became a reverse research tool: the spatiality around me, the sounds, the smells, the touch of other people, all the external impulses had to become void for me. I certainly can’t say that I was able to cancel them completely. Indeed, with sight and hearing it was impossible. However, this exercise at least gave me an idea of how someone who is not the master of their body could feel. My desire to be Minina, and not just to act like a doll, made me extremely vulnerable and fragile: the others moved me to their liking, following their intent and purpose. When, according to the script, they had to throw me away, they did (of course there was some remorse, since although I was Minina at that moment, I was still Vanina). I tried to follow the movement as naturally as possible, but it also gave me some pain. In fact, they could have done anything with me. I felt a condition of fragility so powerful that I almost cried.

In my opinion, these two examples are emblematic of the two different types of actors that revolve around the socio-cultural situation of people with disabilities: the able-bodied and the disabled. In the first case, I was representative of the category commonly understood as people with normal psycho-physical skills. I had complete freedom of movement, as well as total sensory ability (if we do not consider myopia as a defect). This really prevented me from approaching Lukas and made my movements awkward and confused — all of which were emblematic of the way most able-bodied people behave towards people with disabilities: not knowing how to act. (Willett and Deegan 2001) Only when I decided to change my mentality was I able to change my way of interacting with others. In the second case, in becoming Minina I became disabled myself. When I put myself in these clothes, which were so complicated to carry, I realized that this complication arises mainly from the state of inferiority to which these people are relegated. By experiencing both situations, I was able to increase my mental, sensorial,
and cultural knowledge. I assumed that mixture of points of view that allows us to understand the socio-cultural conditions of those who surround us.

5.6 Summary

In this chapter, I presented the use of the body as a tool for investigation and communication, through the examples collected during the rehearsal days at the KulturParken association. These examples allowed me to demonstrate how using one's own body and its embodied perceptions to get closer to someone else's perception - a perspective that is foreign to us - creates a symbolic space in which we can don the other's clothes and try to understand him/her. By implementing this approach, we also allow a passage of information that we could not understand before, as we lacked the key to do so.

In fact, I think that we all have an inner point of view, with which we can see and perceive the world around us. When we are able to meet different points of view, allowing them to mingle, then we can have a pure form of communication. This is precisely what happened in the 2nd phase of the theatre ritual, the liminoid space, as I will explain further in the next chapter.
6. Rituality

The use of the body as a tool of investigation in theatrical practice represents the first step of the process I analyse in this study. What I want to focus on now is the second: how the communicative process finds its further realization through a recognition of the ritual phases of the same theatrical practice. To do so, I first must take a step back and again talk about art: namely, its ability to transcend the material world and thus to reach a state in which signifier and signified are understandable and shared by all users of art itself. In other words, I want to show its sacral aspect; that is, what makes it somehow universal. However, in using the term sacral I do not intend to imply a connection with the divine, although in some cases it may be present.

After this exposition, enriched by and linked to the ethnographic data collected, I will present more closely an analysis of the artistic process behind the show of KulturParken. I will use the three ritual phases recognized by Tuner and Gennep (Turner 1988), looking at the structures of a typical rehearsal day and the Premiere show. Through this analysis, I will also explain the basis for community building as a final product of this ritual, which I will deepen in the following chapters.

6.1 Make the invisible visible

Let us begin with transcendental power. One of the fundamental aspects that makes art a language capable of overcoming communication barriers is its universal ability to make the invisible visible, or even better to make manifest what is not manifest. To better explain the opportunity that art offers us, I would like to look at Michael D. Jackson’s essay about his study of Aboriginal art, The interplay of coming out and going in, which was published in his book The Work of Art - Rethinking the Elementary Forms of Religious Life (2016).

Jackson used his experience among the indigenous people of Central Australia as an example for understanding how the natives’ encounter with Western people in the past years has changed their economic and behavioural condition. Specifically, he talks about how their artistic products are created traditionally, and how the new open market to the West had influenced this process. However, what is interesting for us and this dissertation is the idea that he introduced: the concept of “coming out and going in,” which is a central element of Aboriginal everyday life and thinking. For instance, this concept is applied to the interpretation of the dream world, as nocturnal dreams of individuals become manifest in ritual performances or art. The interpretation of those dreams is less about static conditions such as “being” or “death” but rather about what Jackson calls “metamorphic processes, phases, or passages.” As examples for such processes he presents gestation and birth, sexual intercourse, digestion and defecation, sleeping and waking, or fullness and emptiness. According to this understanding of Aboriginal dream interpretation, “coming out” can be equated with “giving birth.” Each transformation
from a latent status into a patent status is regarded as a process of “coming into being.” In nature this
could be the greening of the desert after rain. Applied to the creation of art, this could mean the
embodiment of dream elements in a piece of artwork. As “coming out and going in” is regarded as an
endless circle that rules the entire idea of Aboriginal being, “going in” is the complete opposite, and
manifests in such instances as a person fainting, feeling homesick, being drained of energy, or passing
away. This circle of being implies that there can never be an end of existence. This eternality, which
Jackson calls the “interplay of coming out and going in,” forms the basis for every visual representa-
cion, ceremony, and form of Aboriginal art. All of the elements that one might tend to sum up as “culture”
are “methods or moments in which something hidden within is made manifest” (Jackson 2016). This
concept explains very thoroughly the meaning of art to the indigenous people of Central Australia: it is
a way of connecting with a “wider world.”

If we observe the change that this tradition suffered in respond to its meeting with Western
society, we see that it involves especially the artistic media: for instance, paint and canvas are now used
instead of human liquids. However, although the economic value changes and the artist – according to
Jackson - seems not worry about the whereabouts of his artwork after selling it, the intrinsic value of
the creation of the art remains. The act of painting and its message — above all the meaning of "coming
out and going in" — remain stationary points of an art that can still be defined as traditional. This is
because painting has more than an aesthetic value, it also arises as a means for indigenous self-
determination in a world that is changing very quickly around them. Jackson puts special emphasis
precisely on the contrast between the art market and art as identity, between the need for indigenous
peoples to keep up with the times and the desire to preserve their knowledge and culture. (Jackson 2016)

In this context, I think the performance we witnessed during the “Jag har Lust!” conference is a
good example for demonstrating Jackson’s idea of the interplay of coming out and going in.

During the welcome event, Destiny and Lukas performed a theatrical dance performance. Unfortu-
nately, I was unaware of the background of this artistic experiment, and it would have been
interesting to know how much of what we witnessed was the result of studied rehearsals or was bloomed
as a feeling of the moment (without detracting anything from the profound preparation that certainly
was behind this performance). One of the important aspects of this performance was that Lukas usually
uses a Permobil to move, but not this time. However, that was not the fundamental focus. The purpose
is otherwise. At the beginning, Lukas and Destiny are seated, back against the back wall of the room,
their legs together and her head sunk between their knees. When the music starts, the movements are
slow, almost embarrassed, they barely touch each other. Then the gestures become safer, a caress, a hug.
They slip on the floor and become a stream that moves in the corridor between the chairs, like a race in
the mountains. The goal is not the sea, but the stage. They twist and get tangled. The dance takes place
in close contact with the floor, and it could not be otherwise since Lukas cannot stand up. Sometimes Destiny pushes him, sometimes it is something different, perhaps the wish to show something never shown before. Movement, music, and emotion become a whole to show how it is possible to create union and communion. The dance becomes the seed from which love will blossom.

I confess that time stopped, and for a moment I forgot about my task (taking pictures). I felt a strong and deep emotion. Later, I talked to some of the participants at the conference, all of whom confirmed my feeling. In fact, it was a powerful and intense moment that deeply involved the audience in the room: there was great emotion among many of the people present, perhaps also due to the engagement with the specific situation (almost half of them were people with disabilities). Talking about it later with some of the participants, I received answers like "I felt touched by the music and the movement," and "It was beautiful, like a poem" up to "it gave me confidence" — intending to assert self-confidence, but also confidence in the success of the “Rätten att leva mitt liv.” My personal reaction was that of a deep emotion, partly due also to my knowledge of Lukas's background and of the artistic work of Destiny.

I could never talk directly with Destiny and Lukas about what artistic research was behind this performance; nevertheless, drawing on my previous experience in the theatre field, I would like to share my interpretation about it. In that dance, characterized by a great energy and fluidity, the actors – but also the audience in a certain way – explore the skin, shapes, dimensions and changes of the dancers' bodies, to give us the possibility to observe and experience what is beyond oneself, in a place where abstraction and reality merge. So, personal research on their identity is presented, along with the possibility for the viewer to see beyond the matter.

I believe that precisely here comes the spirituality of the performance and its power of transcending the material world and entering the abstract one of archetypal meanings. In what I would call an almost sacred moment, the movement manages to create a link between microcosm and the macrocosm, between inner world and the outer worlds. Of course, the fact remains that the true meaning of the dance will come to the recipient filtered by his or her own perception and interpretation.

6.2 Rituality and theatre, building the shared world

Moving further, it is time to look more deeply at the ritual aspect of the theatre. This additional revelation of the sacral aspect of artistic work is reminiscent of the Aboriginal process as shown by Jackson, even if it is presented in a more contemporary way. This particular moment of artistic practice is no longer just about communication, it is also about building a community, a perspective we will deepen in the following chapters.
6.2.1 The rehearsal day

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the structure of the rehearsal days was more or less the same every time: first of all a breakfast together; then a first circle of sharing thoughts, emotions and expectations for the day; the technical rehearsal followed by the lunch break; other rehearsal more focused on emotion, on the construction of the character; a second circle of sharing; a fika all together before going home.

One day in mid-March I arrived particularly early at the rehearsal office, along with Sara, who had come to pick me up at the bus stop. The still-high snow and the unreal light of the 9.00 a.m. Swedish March gave us the idea of being locked in a bubble out of time. That was a bit the sense that the place wanted to give: not far from Uppsala, yet totally immersed in the countryside; reachable yes, but only with a car. I had been rehearsing with the group for a month and I was already used to this morning journey, yet every time we reached the cold square covered with ice I always felt a strange twinge of nostalgia, as if that place was truly suspended in time and in space, in a bubble separate from the rest of the world. That morning, that feeling was strangely strong.

We waited for Ellinor and Nathalie, and finally for Lukas with his special taxi (Nanna had informed me how expensive it was to take a taxi like that, and this was probably one of the reasons why the company met only twice a week). Once inside we removed shoes and coats, Ellinor started to prepare bread and coffee, Sara sliced cucumbers, and Nanna prepared the material for the day. I also moved as if guided by invisible threads, in the familiarity that had made that place from strange to a small den of complicity and sharing. Right there, while I was helping to prepare for breakfast by gathering parts of conversations in Swedish, I realized two things: first, how integrated I was in the group; secondly, we were already within the ritual phenomenon. In fact, if we look back at Chapter 2 again, there I also briefly mentioned that the opening sharing circle should be interpreted as the first phase of the rite de passage identified by Turner, or rather the separation. (Tuner 1988) However, I was wrong: the breakfast all together, set in that place immersed in nature and in the snow, almost separated from a distant and invasive world was already the start of rituality (the show itself was used just to bring a change in that world outside the rehearsal house, therefore for this reason that was a distant world but never a strange one). Still on the surface and very gradually, thanks to the discourse that still related to everyday life, it was a process begun by now, which took the form of a cup of coffee and bread with jam. But if this was only one of my conjectures, what happened soon after was the real beginning, the entrance to the White Rabbit’s den.
1st phase. Opening circle and starter exercises
"It's time to start!"

Nathalie turns off the phone in a hurry, Ellinor settles on the chair, Sara and Lukas stop eating (Sara is usually assisting Lukas during meals) when Nanna asks those present to compose and start the sharing circle. In fact, it is a theatrical exercise, even if seen from the outside it might not seem that way. It is no longer the carefree moment of breakfast, but it is not even the most profound and concentrated moment of rehearsal: it is the transition between one phase and another, in which the actors begin to take off their everyday clothes to prepare to wear those of their own characters. It is a moment, I believe, characterized by a profound trust in the people around us. In fact, what is said in this circle is first of all personal. It can be a reflection on the spectacle itself or on a feeling that it arouses, but the most important thing is the awareness that everyone has the confidence to trust the person sitting next to them, that they will not judge and will try to understand.

This is a constructive but also liberating moment. It's part of the creative process, like brainstorming, but at the same time it's like a door opening. - Nanna

After the circle, the actual day of rehearsal starts; however, we are not yet completely outside the first phase of the rite. The “warm-up” or improvisation exercises still remain, as mentioned in chapter 5.2.

They can vary in type and purpose, and each school or company develops ones that are most congenial to them. Inside the KulturParken, I noticed a prevalence of exercises aimed at improving group work through exercises of trust, as well as improvisation. One in particular impressed me: it was a normal exercise of improvisation on walking, the discovery of space, and meeting with the other. In addition to the walk, there was the “meeting with the other” exercise, which was not limited, as usually happens, to the exchange of a look or word and then each one again going their own way. In this exercise, every time someone met, the actors had to introduce themselves and in doing so they exchanged names, walks, and identities. To make things even more complicated, the identity in question was not that of the person, but that of the character he or she was interpreting. In this way they created a concatenation of passages that involved two levels of awareness: the person’s own, and the already liminal one of the character who would soon take control of the situation. I found it an interesting exercise, which put into motion that exchange of points of view that I myself experienced: in taking the identity of the given character, the physicality of the actors changed, starting from posture and proceeding to movements and expressions. Sometimes even the voice was involved in the process, so Ellinor used the low, deep tone of Mårten, Sara had the sharp, dreamy, and at the same time a bit rough one of Gunhild, and so on.
“It was fun, but it was not easy: for a bit you do not want to let go what is yours (the character) but also you do not know what you get and what you have to become. I tried to be the character that came, to change the way I observe.” – Ellinor

Through this kind of exercise, the process of “levelling” can start, thanks to which everybody is the equal of the other. Then we can slip into the second phase of the ritual.

2nd phase: Technical rehearsal, free rehearsal, and characters development

We have entered a place that enables us to experiment freely in the space Turner identifies as liminoid. Turner attaches great importance to acting through play and recreation in Western societies. In fact, through the free and spontaneous experimentation that the game offers, it is possible to live certain creative experiences, learning to break down and fragment our collective imagination and recombine the cultural elements according to unusual aggregations. According to Turner, what differentiates the liminoid from the liminal is the free and spontaneous component of the first, and the fact that certain practices are a matter of choice and not of obligation. This is the time for greater experimentation and creativity. This is where the shared world is built within the company. Outside we can be strangers and have little or nothing in common, but the moment we are inside the theatrical box, here we connect to each other. We are building something, we are stripping naked, despite the masks we wear due to the need for a script.

At the KulturParken, the liminoid phase begins in the morning with technical rehearsal. The scenes and the show as a whole are repeated several times to make the gestures, expressions, and spoken text an almost mechanical process. The repetition of the actions seems almost to underline the ritual aspect of the theatrical practice. However, the true liminoid moment, as we have just defined it, happens in the afternoon rehearsal: in this frame the attention is more focused towards the construction of the character, and it is precisely here that a phase of free experimentation is manifested, which can allow us to create a reality different from the one we left behind once we have crossed the border between the outside world and the limen.

This continuous living and evolving in this liminoid phase, in which emotions and sensations are extremely high thanks to the particularly fertile creative moment, makes the so-called levelling process take place: we are all the same in essence, we are all present as forming the same entity. As the increasingly intense rehearsal proceeded, the bonds between the actors-characters, director, choreographer, and administrator — and yes, even with the assistant-researcher — became stronger and more stable. A sense of complicity and camaraderie that united us to each other was created, strengthened by the concept of fun that creates cohesion: “collective action creates a shared emotional register and a commitment mechanism.” (Fine and Corte 2017)
3rd phase: Closing circle

At the end of the day, the air is saturated with many things: static energy, expectations and desires, a sort of electric current that cannot be dumped, the pungent smell of sweat, the sweeter smell of bread put on heat. Here, it is time to retrace the path backwards and return to the everyday world.

In general, in this phase a second circle of sharing is carried out, here called closing circle: we are exposed again, but this time we focus on the work just completed, expressing thoughts, perplexities, or ideas. It is at the same time a creative and soothing moment, thanks to which all members of the company - including staff - can empty themselves of everything and return to a state of apparent stillness, while the latent power remains as embers under the ashes. At times a real conclusive exercise can take place, like the one described at the beginning of the chapter.

Just as breakfast is part of the opening circle, I realize now that the end-of-day fika is part of the closing one. The gesture of eating together, which is a co-adjuvant to the construction of a community in itself, also makes sure that the day just passed lingers inside us, adding an extra piece to our experiences. With the experience that has become part of us, our embodied knowledge thereby increases that internal point of view that little by little builds an increasingly vast world that is shared by the others around to us, enabling the process of communication and community building.

This same pattern is also found in other contexts than that of the KulturParken. For example, I have experimented with the three phases of the initial circle, exercises and rehearsal, and closing circle at clowning school in Italy or even in Uppsala itself, at the Kalmar Nation theatre group (of which I am a member). We also need to keep in mind a fundamental characteristic of rituality as exemplified in our succession of rehearsal days: repetition makes it possible to create the ideal condition for building and maintaining networks.

6.2.2 Premiere

Now that I have analysed a typical day of rehearsals at the KulturParken association in the context of the theatre’s ritual aspects, I would like to move from this micro-society context to the macro-community level by applying the same procedure to the staging of the show itself. It is in fact here that Turner’s critical reflection on generating change in society manifests itself: through the free-decomposition and spontaneous re-composition of familiar cultural symbols, and therefore through socio-cultural action, it is possible to attribute significance to the social dramas that arise in the liminal phases of socio-cultural dynamics.

On March 31st I went to the Gottsunda Dans & Teater, not far from my accommodation in Uppsala. It had been a particularly harsh winter, and to my great Mediterranean surprise the snow was still piled at the edges of the road. I crossed Cellovägen and Musikparken in an unusual silence, which
was almost completely abandoned when, a little more than ten minutes later, I reached the Askbanan road, which runs between the Treklange school, Gottsundaskolan, the church, and of course the Gottsunda centrum.

The latter could be taken as a mere mall, but in fact it is much more than that. Located in the district of Gottsunda, south of Uppsala, it appears to be the region’s nerve centre, a cultural meeting point rather than a commercial one. The Gottsunda district has a high percentage of foreign inhabitants (48.7% in 2007, and the number seems to have grown during the last years), especially of Arab origin. On weekends it is not uncommon to see the shops teeming with people from highly diverse social backgrounds. The Gottsunda centum presents a variety of shops and services, and it is interesting to note the presence of several centres of cultural activity, including the library, the fritiden banken, and of course the Gottsunda Dans & Teater, together with the KulturPunten, a bar that is also a gallery and/or a performance space. In short, this place presents itself with the intent to assist in communication, development, and sharing to ensure a good standard of living and community creation. Precisely for this reason, Nanna and the KulturParken had decided to present their premiere right here, in the middle of this sort of crossroads.

We operate in an economically and socially disadvantaged area, but our theatre welcomes children on an equal footing regardless of their background. (...) Here the socio-economically disadvantaged and the privileged ones meet, those with roots in Sweden and those with roots in other countries. Here we meet educators, actors, set designers, producers and light designers. (Gottsunda Dans & Teater website)

I talked before about the silence of Musikparken, which suddenly disappeared when I arrived near the Gottsunda centrum complex. As soon as I entered the street, I could see a lively coming and going of people. When I approached, I realized that some of them were there for the same reason as I: bundled up in their coats, many visitors were chatting or indulging in a last cigarette before the show began, in less than an hour. A sort of funnel next to the library, the entrance to the theatre seemed to invite people to let themselves fall into the White Rabbit's den. The people around me conversed loudly, as they always do in the lobbies of theatres. They met and hugged friends, waved the show’s flyer, or looked with serious and critical eyes at the posters for upcoming shows. With the scent of the women mingling with the rather stale one of multiple coats pressed together, I swam in a stream of spectators while trying to reach the ticket office, and I soon realized that I was most likely the only non-Swedish fish there. The situation was a bit strange, almost paradoxical: I was there to learn how art can help in overcoming communication problems, yet I understood little of was happening around me. For a moment I felt overwhelmed by the cacophony of disconnected, meaningless sounds. Later, I found Sara and Nanna and also had the chance to talk with some of the spectators there, until the hall doors opened.
1st phase: The sacred space

The real theatre hall of the Gottsunda Dans & Teater is large enough to hold a good-sized audience, but small enough to make the situation intimate and cosy. The muffled white lights that illuminated the stage and little else gave me the idea of a sacred place: on the scene was an arrangement of objects familiar to me, thanks to the repeated rehearsals I witnessed, but for the first time they were arranged like a real scene.

In front of my eyes was a world in black and white, with a few two-dimensional elements on the walls with thick black lines, almost like a piece of pop art by Keith Haring. A window, a ladder, a coffee pot. Objects of daily life. Above all a heart with arms outstretched towards the theatre (like the IKEA heart plush, to be clear), as if it wanted to overcome the boundary of the fourth wall and reach not only the actors, but also the audience in the hall. On the stage stood a white coffin, with a woman with long auburn hair lying inside. A little further on was a chair, where someone who we already know well was sitting as if on a throne: Minina, who smiled, welcoming us in the room.

I took a seat in the front row, notebook in hand and ready to squeeze as much information as possible from the show, given my stunted Swedish. Fortunately, next to me sat one of my informants, a woman with whom I had spoken shortly before, and she offered to help me in the most difficult parts.

That was the separation phase. If within the company during the days of rehearsals, this phase could be made not so much through a change of location (although there was a shift between the canteen/kitchen area and the actual rehearsal area), as through the opening circle action; for spectators, it was precisely a matter of physical or emotional separation from the outside world. Whether it is a real theatre building, or a simple group of people gathered around a street show, a sort of border is created between those attending and not attending the show. And we are also developing that same complicity that I mentioned in the closing circle, but this time between actors and spectators — as if they are winking at each other because they will take care of each other's secrets. It is here that perhaps a first embryo of community is born: in establishing the boundary, one closes oneself within it.

2nd phase: Levelling and identification

In this phase, two actions are carried out at a social level: levelling and identification. In tribal rituals, the subjects of the rites go through a levelling process in which the signs of their preliminary status are destroyed and those of the non-liminal status are applied. In the transition phase, the initiates are pushed as much as possible towards a state of uniformity, acquiring in the process a special ability, the power of the sacred. (Turner 1988) In the same way, the audience entering the hall is subjected to the same process: first as regards the distance between the spectator and the actor, in such a way that the spectator is not superior to the stage; and second as regards the persons themselves, who no longer comprise a nebula of individuals, but a compact formation ready to celebrate the game of the theatre.
When the show began, it no longer mattered whether we were Swedish or not, able-bodied or with disabilities. Our gender, age, or profession did not matter: we were all recipients of the message and at the same time its transmitters. We were symbolic space ready to share. We were archetypal. We were Minina.

This game, which takes place using elements of the familiar sphere that are rendered non-familiar, may seem like passive work that the public takes from the actors acting on stage — the real “players” if we want to understand them as such. However, this is not the case: putting themselves on the same level as the actors, the spectators get involved and play with them.

In fact, when this levelling comes to fruition, a phase of identification is also carried out, which can be read both as an identification of the public with the scene presented to them, and an awareness their own identity in general. This is where I think the communication process takes place, in this double identification: the awareness of one's identity that is projected to meet the identity of the subjects on the stage, by implementing a sort of overlap with them, allows the opening of the communication channel. This is the same chisel that breaks through the miscommunication barrier and makes the representation of social drama possible. Again, these are identities matured through the embodied knowledge that meets and influences each other, mixed together with the concept of a dialogical aesthetic. Here is also where the emotional involvement takes place.

3rd phase: The return

This, from the point of view of community building, is perhaps the most important phase. It is here, when the emotions are still fresh and the air is still electric, that the viewer can decide to continue the game or abandon it by declaring it to be concluded. Since the aim of the KulturParken is educational, it is the same company that, using the workshop, ensures that the game does not break down or end.

At this point, after the Premiere, a small refreshment gathering was held in the bar/creative space/exhibition space of the KulturPunkten of the Gottsunda Centrum. All of the staff (including myself) were invited to take part in this opportunity to celebrate the first show and the success of the project. But I could not help but think it was some sort of end-of-day fika, as always happened after the rehearsals. And so, between the dark walls of the gallery, with its paintings and photographs and soft, muffled lights (as if to recreate those of the theatre), we toasted with non-alcoholic champagne and finally closed that first day of ritual. We came back.

6.3 Summary

In this chapter, after showing the transcendent power of the art, I have presented the three phases of the theatrical rite, both in the micro context of the KulturParken theatre company and in the macro one of the society outside of the rehearsal office. As we have seen, the liminal phase, where the liminoid
space is created, allows the exchange of points of views embodied in each of us. In the company, this happens especially during the creative process of the show, among the same actors. In society, the exchange should cross the fourth wall of the stage to reach the audience. Thus, at both levels, the *liminal* phase is where the communication process begins, thanks to the approach to the other and the consequent better comprehension (which however can never be total) of the other’s own perspective on reality.

At the same time, the ritual process brings two other matters: the intense sharing of emotions and perceptions – developed during the identification stage - which turns out to be the basis for community building, and the change in the behaviour of the individual and the network (again, both at the micro level of the company and at the macro one of society). I explain these two arguments further in the next two chapters.
7. The evolution on and off the stage

In the previous chapters I have shown how the concept of embodied knowledge applied to the theatre becomes a valid instrument of investigation and communication, combined with the creative experimentation that the rituality of the performance allows a group to implement during the artistic process. In this chapter I propose to show what happened during the communication process from the theatre company to the audience at the show, demonstrating how this permits an awareness of both sides, actors and public.

Until now I have presented communication as a passage of information, as a way to better comprehend the perspective of another person. Perhaps this is the basic idea that defines this process. In fact, when we speak about communication, usually we implicitly think about an operation coded between two or more actors that allows the transmission and receipt of a message through a medium. This is indeed the most common definition of communication. (Jakobson 2002) According to Shannon and Weaver who have developed the mathematical model of communication, it contains six elements: “a source, an encoder, a message, a channel, a decoder, and a receiver.” (Barfield 2000) Of course, this is one of the meanings of the idea of communication, but it is not the only one. There is another meaning that proves to be interesting for my analysis. According to Thomas Barfield, communication “is behaviour resulting in the transfer of information among organisms, with the purpose of modifying the behaviours of all participants involved in the process. Communication is basic to all life, and essential to living things whose lives are carried out in a social environment” (Barfield 2000) Thus, if on one hand the show “Sagan om Liv och Lust” is in itself the message with which the KulturParken wants to show the social problem, on the other it is a space where the active involvement of the public takes place and several changes are in development.

In this chapter, I will focus my analysis on the Premiere show, looking in particular at these changes and developments as applied to the individuals more than to society (that I will expose further in chapter 8). I will present the show in itself, specifying the themes that it brings on the stage and how these have an impact on the actors and audience. I will also underline the engaging aspect of the theatrical expression and how this involves the spectators on a deep and active level.

7.1 Sagan om Liv och Lust

Here I would first like to present the show, to give an idea of the performance itself, but also to see which topics are staged and highlighted. Moreover, I believe we can consider the characters in the play as informants on the issue of disability and sexuality as well, since they convey the thoughts and emotions of the actors who created them.
Talking about sex is never easy. Even less is talking about love, although many have tried. It is even more difficult to talk about either when we realize the enormous distance that exists between each of us, as well as between an “able-bodied” individual and a person with disability. These were my thoughts as I took a seat in the hall. I observed the stage, the lights, the people swarming on the seats around me, and the growing excitement for the upcoming show. When all of the spectators were seated, Magnus took the stage. He welcomed us, briefly introduced the show and then broadly explained that after the performance a discussion forum would be open to all the participant. And then Magnus left the scene.

The show begins. The lights are lowered. The buzz goes silent. A cough. A single light illuminates a wide coffin on the scene. It is interesting to notice how the show "of life and lust" begins with death.

Je veux d’l’amour, d’la joie, de la bonne humeur
Ce n’est pas votre argent qui f’ra mon bonheur
Moi j’veux crever la main sur le cœur
Allons ensemble, découvrir ma liberté
Oubliez donc tous vos clichés, bienvenue dans ma réalité
Je veux - ZAZ

These are the words with which the show "Sagan om Liv och Lust" opens. On the left is the chair where Minina is seated. On the right of the scene stands a huge white coffin, inside which lies a girl dressed in white. In life she was Gunhild, the wife of the owner of the same burial office where she now rests. However, Gunhild cannot yet leave this world, as the cleaning attendant Kim will soon discover. That morning she arrives to do her daily work, dancing to Je veux’s notes. Then Gunhild wakes up, but she does not understand what is happening.

She leaves the coffin and moves uncertainly, dragging her bare feet on the floor. Kim looks at her in surprise, but she is not afraid of her. Even when an Angel of Death appears, she offers him a coffee. Kim speaks with her voice, but also with her hands, using sign language (in the Swedish code) as if to underline Kim’s firm will to reach the other, whether human or supernatural, while reminding the public of the disability theme. The angel explains that Gunhild has yet to discover something in her life before she can move on. That is why he sent her back and will come to pick her up only when the lesson is learned. With a roar of thunder, the angel disappears.

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12 I want love, joy, good mood/It's not your money that will make my happiness/I want to burst my hand on the heart/Let's go together, discover my freedom/Forget all your clichés, welcome to my reality – Translation by the author.
At this point, Mårten Mårtenson, the owner of the funeral office, enters the scene. Besides being Kim's boss, he was Gunhild's husband. Taken by the joy of seeing him again, she runs towards Mårten and tries to hug him, but all he feels is cold air surrounding his body. At that precise moment, Gunhild realizes that she missed the opportunity to tell Mårten how much she cared about him when she was still alive. However, even now she does not know how to define what she feels:

G: “I have never understood love. How does it feel? What do you do?”13 – Scene I

It is at this point that Minina, "the world expert of everything," enters the scene. Kim introduces her to Gunhild, and thanks to her the two start a journey together to discover themselves, including their feelings, relationships, difficulties, pleasures, how they should express consent, and how to impose limits when needed. But how do you know what is beautiful? Or how do you say no to what's wrong?

At the conceptual basis of the show is the claim of the right to a free and full emotional/sexual life, without external society imposing limitations, whether they are cognitive (i.e., poor sexual education) or behavioural (i.e., Moa's mother, who hinders the relationship between her daughter and Kim). Thus, not only the relationship between sexuality and disability is taken into consideration, but also the freedom to live one's life and relationships at a more universal level.

G: “What do you do when you love someone?”
K: “No clue. At school we learned that you would put a p-stick like a girl, but not what you do when you're excited. At school we learned geography, but not to fix the limits and say stop, I do not want to. At school we learned to be kind to each other, but not to live together.”14 – Scene III

While asking these questions, the characters are talking directly to the audience: the aim of the show is not to give answers, but to allow the spectators to find them within their own personal journey of knowledge and experience.

Personally, I believe that in this journey of self-discovery and discovery of love, the most intense and complex character is that of Mårten. He looks like a person with a strong, almost austere and severe character (he never loses an opportunity to reprimand Kim for slacking). It seems to me that this coldness may be accentuated by the fact that he is on a Permobil (Lukas is the actor). However, despite this sort of exoskeleton that he has built - perhaps to defend himself, perhaps to demonstrate his independence, we cannot know - is a person with deep feelings, capable of an equally intense love:

Gunhild, I did not think you could love someone who was in a Permobil

13 Translation by the author
14 Translation by the author
When you invited me to dinner, I had wings
When you gave me the first kiss I became immortal
When you said you loved me I became love
Gunhild, I will love you over time and space, beyond me and you
Beyond life and death  

One particularly engaging moment was one of the last scenes of the show, and it is interesting to note that once again it was a dance. Gunhild, Mårten and Kim are positioned in a row next to each other. In their hands they hold a map representing our body, through which we can explore ourselves and establish our borders, and a mirror with which we can see the reality that surrounds us and the people that inhabit it. Both are gifts that the Angel has donated to the three protagonists to help them understand the lesson. During the dance there is shock-like movement that spreads among the dancers: Mårten (Lukas) gives a small punch to Kim (Ellinor), who waves like an energy shock and then passes this energy to Gunhild (Nathalie) with the same fist. Then they slowly start to turn on themselves, with Kim in the centre, holding the mirror-that-observes in one hand and indicating what is shown around them with the other, including the public. At the end of the show and before the workshop, when the emotion was still present in the theatre, I asked my neighbour what she thought of that scene: “It was strong. I felt called into question,” she answered, then extended the question to her companion. He told me that it was interesting to understand that we are part of a network: “Sometimes we have the feeling of a We and the Others. But it is not true: there is only one Us, because we all influence each other.”

7.2 Prejudice and its overcoming

The show advances different issues about sex and love: what we like, what makes us feel good, what does not work for us, what we do not want others to impose on us, the importance of knowing how to say no, etc. Furthermore, one important topic raised is a problem experienced every day by people with disabilities, not only in the field of sex, and perhaps it is the core of the miscommunication between “able-bodies” and people with disability: prejudice and shame. In chapter 3, we saw how disability is almost always felt as something to be ashamed of, which should be hidden, certainly not something to be proud of. But we have also seen how disability art has the purpose of proudly displaying its identity, accepting disability as a point of strength and uniqueness and not as a lack.

I believe that this pride and the overcoming of prejudice have also shown themselves in the artistic work of the KulturParken. As matter of fact, I think I can talk of a double prejudice: the one, maybe more obvious, suffered from people with disability from the able-bodied, which pushes them to feel ashamed for themselves; on the other side is the one suffered from the able-bodied, who endure the

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15 Translation by the author
critical thinking of the person with disability — that look that says "I know you are judging me", even to the point of believing that "I know you will hurt me", “You will not understand me” or “You will laugh at me.” Sometimes the recognition of this phenomenon is not so obvious, as it is contrary to the trend usually taken into consideration, but I think it is important to recognize it in my analysis.

An example of the prejudice phenomenon is presented at the beginning of the fourth scene. Entitled "My body," it is an emblematic example. Shortly before, Kim and Mårten quarrel: she wants to ask if Moa can start working at his company, also with the support of the LSS's decision and the right that it entails to choose a job without suffering prejudice, precisely for their disabled condition. However, Mårten refuses Kim's request, leaving the scene and exclaiming "You're so embarrassing!"

The fourth scene opens on Gunhild and Kim, who cannot hold back the frustration:

K: now damn it's enough! I am NOT embarrassing!!
G: something embarrassing you are ...
K: why am I embarrassing? All I want is to be myself.
Why cannot my body be beautiful?
Why do not people with me appear in the movies or at the theatre?
Why do not we decide who we can love!?!7 - Scene IV

Of course, here the focus is on the physical presence of a person, his aesthetic pleasure if we want, but the discord of non-acceptance has deeper roots. Once again, society itself is the cause of this feeling of inadequacy. The show brings this feeling to the scene without hesitation and without thinking of having to apologize for it. Kim becomes a spokesperson for anyone who feels different and therefore excluded or confined and controlled (remember that Kim is in love with Moa), forcing the audience to realize this condition of frustration and inviting him to change his point of view in this regard.

Moreover, an episode during rehearsal is interesting to mention in this regard because I believe it also shows the second kind of prejudice that I presented before. One day in mid-February, when it was nearly two weeks before the Premiere, a small earthquake took place at the KulturParken headquarters shortly after lunch. We had already run the technical rehearsal and were preparing for intense emotions during the afternoon session. Everything was going smoothly: the first scene had slipped away without too many hitches, when at the entrance of Lukas's character (Mårten), Nathalie crashed. She would have had to get out of the coffin again, but she did not want to put even a foot out of it.

“I don’t know if I can do it”18

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16 Swedish Act concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments
17 Translation by the author
18 Translation of Sara; at the same time, it may not be literal.
Nanna told me about this episode, which often happened during the rehearsals: "They behave like children, but they are only excuses". This admission of weakness sometimes arose perhaps from laziness, perhaps playing on the same idea that Kulick and Rydström talk about, which brings disabled people closer to an idea of childhood and innocence (Kulick and Rydström 2015); however, at times, it arose from a deeper feeling rooted in them: a profound sense of inadequacy, which clashed against the wall of prejudice of others and which led each of them to question themselves. These roots are so strong.

A similar thing happened just the day before the Premiere: while I was accompanying Nanna in the background to arrange some scenic gear in the dressing room, shortly after the post-show workshop, she told me that they were about to cancel everything and send all the work to the air. "I was very angry with them. They were deconcentrated, almost listless. So, I told them that they had to recover and be present, otherwise I did not let them go on stage!" Fortunately for the company and for the benefit of the public, they finally did it.

"Why do you say you cannot make it?" Magnus asked Nathalie, while she was standing still with her arms crossed. "Because I just cannot do it" she replied.

I believe that at that moment a gash opened up between the liminoid area and the outside world. Just before, Nathalie had been totally immersed in a world of possibilities, experimentation, and creativity. In a sense, a world of latent power prepared to manifest itself. But that feeling of inadequacy (which often happens when one faces the performance process\textsuperscript{19}, but is perhaps amplified in this case by the particular psycho-physical condition of the actress) had forced her to return to a reality in which she feels just a disabled person. Nathalie is the person with whom I had the opportunity to talk about disabilities in a wider way, as far as our linguistic gaps allowed. Nathalie is proud of being what she is and does not feel it as a burden or as a lack. She is not different, she is not special. She is a person, with her normal needs and desires. This is an interesting fact, if one thinks that one of the "accusations" made against those who want to focus on the problem of sexuality among people with disabilities is precisely that "they want to have special concerns, but why should they?" (Kulick and Rydström 2015) The simple and disarming fact, and perhaps because of this hard to accept for some, is that this is not the truth. It is the same people with disabilities who admit it. So, how does a person so deeply proud feel so scared that she has to say "I cannot do it"? I believe that precisely here is where the phenomenon of prejudice from the person with disability towards the able-bodied can be found: through the words "I cannot do it", the person with disability creates a sort of barrier within which to escape from an alleged stereotype that could come from outside. However, it is important to say that here I do not mean in any way to diminish the feelings and emotions that surely were shaking Nathalie's soul. The scene was paused for five or ten minutes while we tried to convince Nathalie to resume the character and the interpretation. We did a free dance exercise (in which I was involved too) to restore a sort of calm. However, this

\textsuperscript{19} My personal experience
episode highlighted one of the most delicate aspects of this artistic work: the need to find a balance between personal feelings of the actors involved and what their own characters should communicate once on stage.

I said that on the day of the Premiere Nathalie was perfect (chapter 5.3), present and intense as the character of Gunhild had to be. She did not falter or hesitate in challenging herself. I think that the importance of what was staged, combined perhaps with the fact that she was wearing someone else's mask, which guaranteed her a sort of removal from her daily status and elevated her to a state of messenger, was stronger than the fear of judgment. Moreover, here was the echo of what Swain and French affirm about disability art: what Nathalie experienced was the creation of an image of strength and pride. (Swain and French 2000)

7.3 Who is the real actor?

If what has just been exposed is lived by the actors in first person, on the other side the same audience of the Premiere, for a good part composed of people with intellectual disabilities, undergoes a change during the show. This is due, as we have seen, from the liminoid phase, during which the processes of levelling and identification are created, by means of which the spectators implement that encounter/exchange with the actors that allows the communication procedure. However, there is a second aspect to consider.

One of the reasons why art makes communication possible is the active involvement of the viewer that it causes. This involvement can take place in a variety of ways. Just think of the so-called Stendhal Syndrome, also known as the Florence Syndrome (a city in which it is often manifested), where the viewer of works of art of extraordinary beauty reaches a level of involvement that leads to a psychosomatic affection that causes tachycardia, dizziness, vertigo, confusion, and hallucinations. (Magherini 2003)

From the theatrical point of view, this involvement takes place directly through the fourth wall, the imaginary filter located at the edge of the stage, which should separate the audience from the actors. Actors can behave differently towards this fourth wall: they can decide not to cross it (the wall is there and cannot be overcome); they can wink at the audience, making the spectators understand they are aware of being inside that box and that someone is watching them; in some cases they might decide that that boundary does not exist and play with the audience through that; or again they can deliberately decide to go beyond the fourth wall, forcing the public to be actively involved.20

20 These facts are the result of my own experience gained during several years of theatre study and clowning practice.
To this sort of game that the actor can apply directly to the audience, we can add two correlated concepts: relational and the dialogical aesthetics. (Kocur and Leung 2012) According to Nicolas Bourriaud (2002), in the relational aesthetic “every artist has his own world of forms, problematic and trajectory and there are not necessarily links in terms of stylistic, thematic or iconographic between them. But all of them work in the sphere of interhuman relationships, in which social exchange and interaction is offered.” This is important for us to understand how art is – or can be - engaged in social issues and how it makes or form communities. Bourriaud talks about the “domain of exchanges” that can be achieved depending on the nature of the work, the participation of the audience, and the models of sociability suggested.

And we must judge that “domain of exchanges” on the base of aesthetic criteria, or in other words by analysing the coherence of its form, and then the symbolic value of the “world” it offers us or the image of human relations that it reflects. Within this social interstice, the artist owes it to himself to take responsibility for the symbolic models he is showing: all representation refers to values that can be transposed into society (though contemporary art does not so much represent as model) and insert itself into the social fabric rather than taking inspiration from it. (Bourriaud 2002:162)

Close to this first thought we can put the dialogical aesthetic, in which the participatory discursive role of the spectator is crucial for the artwork. According to Grant Kester (2013), “the dialogical practices” require a common discursive matrix (linguistic textual, physical, etc.) through which participants can share insights and forge a provisional sense of collectivity”. (Kester 2013:84) I think we can place the KulturParken performance in this scenario. Kester argues that in this kind of project, “conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself. It is re-framed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities and official discourse.” (Kester 2013:78)

This is what happens in the “Sagan om Liv och Lust” show, both during the performance - when the audience is engaged through the reconnection of feelings and thoughts shown in the scene that already belong to them - and at its conclusion, when the public is called to take part in a workshop, or forum, on the subject dealt with. In this performance the spectator engages in a full experience. The involvement has specific purposes: including overcoming prejudices, embarrassment, shame, and fear.

I believe that relational and the dialogical aesthetics are deeply connected with the social drama concept that Turner brings within the discourse on theatre rituality. (Turner 1986) To explain this connection, I will present here the experience I had at the entrance to the theatre, just before the hall doors opened for the Premiere. I mentioned how the hall was full and noisy and how I had a sense of being lost or swimming between its walls. However, after meeting Sara and Nanna, I managed to break
the ice with some of the people around me. I spoke a little with the spectators who were waiting for the doors to open: everyone had a sort of expectation for the show. There were, obviously, several people with disabilities, but I also met other types of spectators: people actively involved in the matter (parents or relatives, assistants and social workers, people responsible to relevant associations), but also those who had only heard something about the problem, or who wanted to attend the workshop that would take place after the show. I had the opportunity to converse with people who were active in various associations, and all of them confirmed the pressing need to spread knowledge of the situation as broadly as possible. Silence, as we have seen, is their worst enemy, an enemy who seems to be very reclining in Swedish cotton clouds.

These conversations turned out to be informal interviews, even though I encountered some trouble in carrying them out. Sometimes I was able to explain who I was and talk about my research; other times the conversation was about the subject of sexuality, and the intensity with which my interlocutors spoke about it did not allow me to dwell on details such as me and my study. Often, my speakers were the relatives of children with disabilities and even if we had the chance to talk about the show itself, what they wanted to talk about was above all the sense of frustration that they feel in their condition of profound impotence, which is due to society. However, despite this being an interesting and engaging topic (about which I have developed a deep concern), I was not there for a discussion of it. This remains a thorny ethical problem that I do not know how to solve: on one part I know I should be professional and be super partes, on the other it is extremely difficult for me not to get involved in this cause. Several times my study risked a shift towards something else, such as study on the relation between sexuality and disability itself, but that was not my original idea. Thus, at the Premiere, I tried to take up the reins of my research, asking the following question of as many people as possible:

**Are you aware that you yourself are an actor in a social drama?**

In the Introduction, I explained how social drama takes place when a rift is created in the everyday reality of a society. This rift goes to show its subcutaneous layers, while the social drama creates oppositions between the different social categories. I believe that the opposition is revealed concretely through the awareness of the presence of the rift by the members of those social categories. In this case, the spectators of “Sagan om Liv och Lust,” who belong to the same category of people who face the problem of disability and sexuality in their daily lives, become representatives of the opposition – shown here through the recognition of the right to live a full and satisfying sexuality - taking this issue over the border of the theatre.

With my question, my intention was to see and understand how widely this awareness was spread among the spectators. I managed to speak fruitfully with about twenty of them. Almost all responded with an interesting answer: if we consider only the real theatrical work, the message cannot
really reach the community. The theatrical action is only the first step, but for many of my informants the communicative act began just as the curtain fell. So, is it possible to say that the theatre work and experience is just the tip of the iceberg? I personally believe that the “shared word” is a strong component of the contemporary artistic experience, as it is often the case that interest in an exhibition, show, or movie is aroused by “hearsay.” In this ethnographic example, “shared word” is crucial to the measure of success that the KulturParken association has set itself.

Later after the show, the forum was held in which the participants can discuss the topics dealt with in the performance: what it means to love someone; how we open up to our own sexuality and to that of others; how to put limitations on what we do not want. The workshop was fruitful for the association, and thanks to my seat neighbours, I managed to translate most of the ideas that were shared. What was interesting for my research is how we got to this sharing forum. All of the ideas and proposals that were shared, in fact, derive from the use of the so-called Legislative Theatre.

Our original idea was to use theatrical education as an educational tool to transmit new skills and tools to the target group, but along the way we understood what are the potential methods for the processes of change and participation in society. It has become an opportunity for participants to think constructively about their daily lives, formulate their opinions and make their voices heard.
– Rapport med deltagarnas röster ur “Rätten att leva mitt Liv”, 2018

In fact, on its website the same association declares it uses the tenets of the Legislative Theatre and those of Augusto Boal’s Teatro dell’oppresso (theatre of the oppressed). The last, which is designed for non-actors, uses the universal language of theatre as a means of investigating the lives of entire people and communities, while inviting critical thinking and dialogue. It is about analysing rather than giving answers, acting and interacting and not just talking. Boal developed specific theatrical techniques with the actors so the spect-actors could spread the message of social criticism. (Salatino 2011) Boal’s intentions were for theatrical techniques to be used to encourage people to active citizenship and to participate actively in political and social life. If it is true that socio-political changes affect everyone’s lives, including the weakest people, then in this sense the theatre aims to represent daily oppressions with the intent of finding strategies to face and possibly transform them. One of the reasons for the popularity of the Teatro dell’Oppresso is the idea of activating the spectator (called precisely the spectator/actor), placing him or her at the centre of theatrical work, in order to include different representations of reality and explore possible transformations in a creative and socialized form. (Salatino 2011)

The signature feature within the KulturParken show is that the actors themselves are people with intellectual disabilities, and I think this is the key aspect of the effectiveness of this project. This feature brings disabled viewers closer to a reality that they know and suffer, and thanks to the empathic aspect
of theatrical performance, they manage to overcome these limits by being able to share thoughts and experiences they would not have been able to otherwise. Even audiences who are not affected by disability and have no real connection with this world are so involved in what is presented that they feel they can and want to contribute in some way to what is presented. This was precisely my case. After approaching this issue for the first time thanks to the KulturParken group, I am now more aware of the reality around me. This awareness came in two ways: the first was of the protagonists’ problem (disabled people and sexuality), but the second is perhaps more important, since I realized that there are realities all around me that I ignore.

On the other hand, I could not confirm my thoughts with any of the spectators present. In fact, at the end of the workshop, groups of people came together - as is often the case in theatre halls - to actively give their opinion on the staging, etc. At this point, trying to isolate myself from the mass of people around me, I realized that I was perhaps the only person not directly connected to the cause taken into consideration. Is this the limitation of this type of theatre — involving only those who are already somehow orbiting like a satellite around it? Because if on the one hand I agree with what my informants said about actual communication beginning when the curtain fell, on the other I wonder how effective it is to always talk with the same people (not by chance, some of the people present at the theatre are faces that I would have seen at the October conference). Of course, it must be said that this was the Premiere, and that probably all of the people involved with the associations and the administration came to this show. Talking to Nanna after their tour, she told me that the workshops were a great success and that many people were reached by their message.

7.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have exposed what happened during the communication process put into practice during the Premiere show at Gottsunda Dans & Teater. What we have witnessed is an evolution that involves both the actors and the spectators.

Firstly, if obviously the show itself brings to light several important topics for achieving the purpose of the KulturParken association - education and awareness - at a deeper level it becomes a place of investigation in which the public can find their own answers to the questions posed by and in the show. Secondly, the show illustrates the important issue of society's prejudice towards people with disability. However, in my analysis I wanted to recognize also a second type of prejudice, by people with disabilities towards society, a prejudice in which these people sometimes seem to take refuge. I believe that by addressing this topic, the show also becomes an active tool for analysing and understanding this phenomenon, thus leading to overcoming it from an emotional and mental point of view. Lastly, the show encourages strong involvement by the spectator: at the end of the theatrical process of ritual and communication, he/she becomes an essential active component to ensure that this
process continues to develop. All of these factors lead to a social impact, which I will reveal in the next chapter.
8. More than the theatrical work: community and power relations

In the previous chapter I shown what happened during the theatrical communication process, focusing on the individual. In this chapter, I will expose what occurs beyond the stage and how this communication process has an impact in a wider context. In doing so, I will try to answer my research question: how does the theatrical work of KulturParken bring changes within the community?

In order to reach this answer, I will also present the specific aim of KulturParken and how the association achieves it in addition to the use of the theatre. Then I show how its work leads to a change in the society in which the artistic expression has been displayed. This change presents itself in two ways: the creation of community, or *communitas* as Turner defines it, and a shift in power relations (these two in turn are represented with the concepts of liminality of the disability and of the dissensus).

8.1 Put the focus on the issue

As we have seen, one important aspect of the theatrical work promoted by KulturParken is its mission of education and sensitization. The association create an awareness of a social problem, thus bringing a change to current, crystalized situation. So, the first of KulturParken’s goals is to bring problematic issues to light.

The wish for visibility is something that Nanna wanted to be very clear about from the beginning of my research. As a first contact, I phoned her one evening in early February, and what was supposed to be an organizational call to fix our first meeting became a real interview. (Bernard 2011) We talked about the theatrical medium, about her interest in using it to raise questions about democracy, rights, and participation, and of the magic created by its immediacy and symbiosis with the public. Talking about her work with KulturParken and with people with disabilities, she said: “I want them to have a voice.” She was absolutely firm about this point. Later, she would explain how difficult it is for people with disabilities to rise and talk loudly and openly about the issues they encounter every day. From one side, of course it is a matter of prejudice, but in a certain way it is also a problem of fear (Kulick and Rydström 2015) or even just a refusal to see the issue.

In a 2015 interview with *Uppsala Tidningen*, Nanna said: "These are people with a strong and healthy desire for life, for themselves and for others. But there is a problem in silence, much like the silence of the Swedish Democrats ... we do not want to wake the sleeping bear.” (Castillo Nanna 2015) Her argument recalls the same words encountered in the study of Kulick and Rydström, which stress the problem of silence and closure that hovers around these people, forcing them to live in a bubble of their own reality.
To be able to leave this stasis, the purpose of the show “Sagan om Liv och Lust” and the workshops the association develops and shares “is to create a room where we can talk about sex, relationships and limits. We want to talk about what many see as private, but without being private. This is a big difference.” (Jag Har Lust! website)

In turn, Nathalie, confirmed this purpose. One afternoon in early March, in a difficult Swedish/English conversation, she talked about sex and disability, and how this relationship is experienced: “many people believe that we don’t have these needs, but we actually have them all. I want them to know.” Thus, ignorance is the biggest enemy, both direct and indirect. It is indirect for those who are unaware of this problem, which is something on which the community can work. Sharing word and ideas, with the help of the performance, it is possible to change this ignorance. The ignorance is direct when the problem is actively ignored by those who should care about the situation but are too uncomfortable to deal with it. This nexus is where social drama takes place (Turner 2017). With its mission and its own educational projects, the KulturParken association moves society, bringing to light the problem of ignorance about relationships, sex, and feelings, not only of people with disabilities but also those who revolve around them. In this sense, the KulturParken association becomes the chisel that opens the slit in social reality and create the liminal space that will lead the same society to a change.

8.2 Talking about sex

In addition to the show "Sagan om Liv och Lust," which in itself is an effective means of communication and involvement, the association KulturParken also operates on other fronts. The most concrete example is the "Jag har Lust!" conference, where the topic of sex and relationships is dealt with by analysing its different aspects: from how to approach the other person and establish a relationship, to how to deal with the issue of abuse, to the knowledge of oneself and one's own pleasure. In fact, I think one of the strengths of the KulturParken association is talking about sex frankly, without fomenting that aura of taboo and dirt that sometimes characterizes it.

Attending the “Jag har Lust!” conference was the final part of my fieldwork, which occurred after the forced summer break (the company finished the tour of the show "Sagan om Liv och Lust" in June and has not reunited since then). The effectiveness of the conference resided in its wanting to be wider than the play, even if both events fell under the project “Rätten att leva mitt liv,” to involve associations, service personnel, politicians, staff, and relatives.

When I arrived at Konsert and Kongress, the first familiar face I saw was Nathalie's. She was one of the staff members responsible for welcoming the guests and guiding them through the conference’s day. "Here she is!" ("Här är hon!") she exclaimed running towards me. Then, as if remembering she had a role to respect, she slowed down her pace, composed herself, and showed great
professionalism in her welcome. "We are here for an important mission" she told me, underlining the importance of both the conference and her own role.

Once I found Nanna and received the sacred camera to achieve my photographer role, she explained how the days would evolve: the conference was composed of an introductory part, followed by a series of workshops held on both days so that all of the participants could take part in each one. Therefore, there was a brief organizational meeting with the managers of the various workshops, after which everyone was poised to perform their tasks. After the meeting I was able to get closer to the other members of the company.

Upon the arrival of the guests (all adults), everyone moved to what would be the main conference room, where the introductory event and one of the workshops would take place. On the walls of the room were sheets with questions concerning the topic of the two days: What is a good and healthy relationship? What does it mean to live a full sex life? How do I understand what is my limits, and how can I make them clear to others? On a chair to one side of the door sat the doll Minina, proudly wearing the event’s t-shirt. On its black background the profile of a breast stood out in a bright pink; underneath it the sentence "om sex, kärlek och rätten" reminded us that she was not just a doll, not just as a scenic medium, and would play a fundamental role in the conference experience.

The conference opened with a brief introduction on its purpose, and on the figures that would soon take the floor. However, the very first event that the guests could attend was a short theatrical representation that dealt with the issues of interest. It was neither KulturParken’s main show, nor a summary of it. It was a short show starring a several boys and girls, one of them in a wheelchair. The situation presented was quite common: people want to have fun with an evening at a pub or disco, and maybe even meet someone special. However, the conflict of the girl in the wheelchair is exposed, both for her direct relationship with the other people on stage (e.g., fear that people can make fun of her, being pushed aside or not accepted) and for the cumbersome presence of an apprehensive mother (whom we never see on the scene but who repeatedly calls the girl to make sure she is fine and safe). Despite its simplicity, or perhaps thanks to it, the show achieves its purpose: in the moment when only the girl and her wheelchair stand out on the tiny stage, nothing else matters. In a single moment one can perceive loneliness and discouragement — feelings so common, yet sometimes ignored. Even those who believe themselves to be distant from problems such as those faced by disabled people find themselves nailed to the chair for that same feeling that they believed did not belong to them. After this little show, came the dance by Destiny and Lukas described in Chapter 6.1, which was followed by several workshops. The need to deepen sexual education is precisely the reason for the conference’s workshops: “through drama, theatre and conversation, people with intellectual disabilities have conquered languages and
experiences, tools and knowledge about rights, sex, love, relationships, emotions and body.”

(KulturParken 2018) I have already presented two of the participants talking about the body as a means of investigation. Let us see the others.

1. **Video lesson on how put borders in place.**

In this workshop, a video on sexual abuse was presented. In a sense, this issue concerns not only the sexual problems of people with disabilities, but those of all minorities considered to be weak.

In this video, a girl affected by intellectual disability is approached by the driver who accompanies her at work. Initially, the approach seems to be an innocent one and the interest genuine. Soon the game (as it seems to be for the driver) takes a different turn, more dangerous and frightening for the girl. The doubt she feels is palpable, and she is torn between wanting to be accepted and the thin border that she does not want to overcome (because she is perfectly aware of what it means to go beyond that boundary). The end is left almost open, with a sweet and sour taste. After watching the video, a discussion opens among the participants. It is interesting to notice the use of a medium that helps in understanding the topic of discussion. In this sense, the video takes the place of the theatrical medium, making itself an active bearer of the message.

2. **Discovering one's sexuality**

This workshop was the most difficult to sustain, not so much for the subject matter as for the behaviour of its participants. It consisted of the presentation of several sex toys and their use (which obviously was explained at a theoretical level). The problem I think was the difficulty of managing this topic with people who were not confident with sex. It was not only the hilarity that some objects generated in the participants: the embarrassment was obvious, and questions exploded in the air such as "where do I have to put that?!" The responses were halfway between the scandalized and the goliardic, up to someone who had closed inwards, not speaking for fear of showing the excitement. These reactions showed me, once again, the dimension of a problem that is widespread. These are adults who have had little or no sexual education, with a consequent almost total ignorance of their own body.

This workshop reminded me of the Premiere as well: there was a curious situation just before the hall’s door opened for the performance. Shortly after my arrival at the Gottsunda Dans & Teater, I found Sara managing a banquet table near the entrance to the hall. Brochures on KulturParken, the LSS, and relationships in general were displayed, and on the far side were a series of manuals on sex, pleasure, and masturbation, along with a small group of sex toys. For a moment I remained surprised: this was an aspect of KulturParken work that Nanna had never told me about. Not that I thought that showing a

21 “Med hjälp av drama, teater och samtal har personer med intellektuella funktionsnedsättningar erövrat språk och erfarenheter, verktyg och kunskaper om rättigheter, sex, kärlek, relationer, känslor och kropp.” Translated by the author.
plastic vagina near a show that talks about sex was unacceptable (honestly, I even found the thing ironic); I just did not understand why they should be so explicit in their activities. I understood the reason better afterwards. I took a seat behind the banquet with Sara and stood for a moment watching her while she was talking animatedly with some ladies, who, like me, had been struck by the curious display. Some seemed to find it a fun find, while others did not seem to agree particularly with that eccentric choice. They seemed annoyed, despite their interest in the show. "See," Sara told me shortly after, "the fact is this: you have to break the bank, break the barrier and if you want to do it you must be brave, think outside the usual."

After the show, Nanna further clarified my doubts on the matter: the question was not only to open a breach in people's prejudices, the display had a real educational purpose. She took from the display what at first sight looked like a craft jewel, a little rough and unpolished. It was a sort of an upside-down V, with the two arms a bit swollen and curved backward, while the summit protruded slightly forward. She showed it to me, suddenly extremely serious:

This is a clitoris. It's what we have inside us, right here [pointing to her lower abdomen]. But nobody knows, not even women know it. There are women who do not think they can enjoy it. It is for this reason that we show it to them.

Thus, this matter goes beyond the sphere of disability, opening the door to another problem that involves a large part of society: the lack of sexual education.

3. The massage

Held by Nanna and Nathalie, this workshop seemed to be a softer version of the sex toys one. It was about trying different types of massagers on oneself or on others. Although the situation could have been ambiguous, as it presented an active component of interaction, the atmosphere was more relaxed than the other workshop. Did that depend on a border not being exceeded? When asked about the purpose of the workshop, Nanna said it was a method to get in touch with oneself and others through a pleasant activity, even if it was not declared as being sexual.

All of these actions take place through the direct involvement of both the people that the KulturParken association defines as its target group — i.e., people with LSS decision (KulturParken 2018) — and a wider audience that revolves around them: associations, parents, institutions, etc. The result of these actions is the desired change in society I mentioned previously, the description of which I want to deepen below.
8.3 Communitas

So here we are after the theatre ritual. The rehearsal is completed, the show staged, the workshops fully experienced. The message has been sent and received. Thus, something was created that until now we had been trying to reach: community. I want to refer here to these words from Rancière, concerning art and politics:

Politics is something that in itself is always aesthetic. And in artistic creation it is always a question of creating certain forms of community. Because the community is not just people who are together or embracing, community can mean that we put words together with words, words with images, spaces with times. So, we create forms of common fabric, we put things together and create worlds that are common worlds. (Rancière 2016)

I believe that the idea of "common worlds" is the one that best summarizes what up to now I have searched for through my analysis, both from the communicative point of view and as a space for action in this social struggle. But which kind of community can we find here and now? First, it is necessary to reprise the difference between the liminal and the liminoid: liminality has a universal character, while liminoid genera emphasize the role of the individual innovator. In this context, therefore, we recognize a totalizing liminal phase in what we can call a revolution of society. From this totalizing limen, which in our case can be the form of protest carried out through the theatrical medium, is born what Turner defines as communitas, with its three different aspects (see chapter 1.3.2): the spontaneous communitas, the ideological communitas, and the normative communitas. (Turner 1988)

Applying these three realities to the ethnographic example of the KulturParken, we find them on all three levels: the spontaneous communitas manifests itself in the theatrical practice, which projecting itself from the stage to the audience makes each participant part of and integral to the whole. The gathering together within that space-time (Benjamin 2008) makes sure that the bond of sharing is established. At this stage, it is as if we were to create and open a door that connects the micro-cosmos of rehearsal, the prerogative of a few, to the macro-cosmos of society. The people with whom I spoke outside the theatre, waiting for the hall doors to open, demonstrated precisely this will and disposition of mind that allows this transition from micro to macro. The ideological communitas develops during the performance itself, through the influence of the different points of view: the identification with the subjects of the performance allows the public to put themselves on stage and vice versa, as if the exercise of "exchange of the name/identity" was here revived on a large scale. So, among the spectators stands a Gunhild, a Kim, an Angel who is above the parties and, on closer inspection, even a Nanna, the silent guide behind the scenes. Here the meeting among different points of view finds its space, allowing us to engage in the development of a new, unique, and at the same time common point of view. The normative communitas finds its reason to be in what happens after the show, and the “shared word” of
which we spoke in the previous chapter is one of the actions that composes it. On closer inspection, the same KulturParken is a normative *communitas*, formed thanks to a common purpose but also through theatrical practice and rehearsal. What changes now are the connections that have been created between the different associations, workers, and volunteers, all the fauna that compose the audience of this specific show, which becomes a meeting point and a place of exchange: again, marking a shift from a more contained reality to the wider one of social reality. We have thus obtained a new network of relationships.

### 8.4 Power relations

Next comes the explanation of the second goal that the KulturParken association wants to reach, besides education and sensitization: a shift of power lines. But what are these power lines and who fixes them?

#### 8.4.1 Liminality and Disability

Think about Foucault’s concept of biopolitics:

By this I mean a number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the 18th century, modern Western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species. This is what I have called biopower. (Foucault 2009)

I believe that in terms of sexuality this concept can be applied equally to persons affected by disability. I refer to the constriction that people with disabilities suffer from institutions that control them. It is done psychologically through a politics of silence that does not allow them to express themselves and live their needs fully - with all of the consequences for their moods, their self-acceptance, their ability to relate with other people, etc. One of the allied behaviours highlight by Kulick and Rydström involves physical manipulation, which can sedate the person’s sexual impulse. For example, they talk about a maneuver called *penisdödargreppet*, “the penis-killer grip” (Kulick and Rydström 2015:80) to be implemented when “a man gets an erection during a bath or when one is changing his trousers or his diaper.” (Ivi) This maneuver is taught unofficially by more experienced nurses to their assistants with the precise aim of not dealing with the “problem” of sexuality, so they can “put the bear back to sleep”, so to speak. (Kulick and Rydström 2015:78) I believe that the most harmful aspect of this institutional practice is its tacit recognition, which largely harms the freedom of the individual. There is a widespread use of control actions that, in a sense, force people with disabilities to abjure their own sexuality and sexual life. Even at the Premiere this topic came under the spotlight:
Even Eleanor Belin was pleased with the visit to the theatre. She discovers that the play shows how staff and parents sometimes establish and control what the sexual life of people with disabilities can have:
- You may not be allowed to sleep in group accommodations or service bases. I am an adult, so I have the same rights as a lost person normally?

Another among the audience was Pernilla Rydberg Hallén. Even if you think it's bad when the staff tries to control the sexual lives of their residents:
- I know many where the staff said: "Stop! You must not get hugged, so we will not do this.” (Sverige Radio 2017)

The policies and positions I have just spoken about generate a very special situation for people with disability: their liminal condition.

Many researchers (including Deegan, Murphy, Shalinsky and Glascock, Nicolaisen, and Devlieger) have in fact identified a similarity between the liminal state manifested in the rites of passage and the state that individuals with disability experience in their own lives. This dynamic is connected to the social model of disability (see Chapter 3.2), according to which ours is a disabling society that forces people with disabilities into this liminal state.

In their study Liminality and Disability: Rites of Passage and Community in Hypermodern Society, Jeffrey Willett and Mary Jo Deegan, highlight different aspects of these similarities. According to Turner, "liminality is a movement between fixed points and is essentially ambiguous, unsettled, and unsettling. (...) Liminars are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony” (Turner 2017). An ambiguity is created, which characterizes the social situation of liminal persons. Basically, whoever is in this situation can be considered “neither this nor that, child nor adult, woman nor mother. As a result, the liminal individual is often invisible both structurally and physically.” (Willett and Deegan 2001) This invisibility is precisely what people with disabilities suffer from on different fronts of everyday life. Just think of what Kulick and Rydström said earlier (Chapter 2.1). Moreover, “other members of society find it difficult, if not impossible, to interact with individuals who defy all social categories, who are in a sense non-persons.” (Willett and Deegan 2001)

This is already in itself a remarkable and interesting point in common between liminality and disability, but Willett and Deegan show another aspect that here turns out to be important: the asexuality, or the sexual fluidity of the liminal condition. “Frequently, there is an androgynous quality to the liminal individual” or even a different conception of sexual activity “sometimes stressing sexual abstinence or a greater degree of sexual freedom.” (Willett and Deegan 2001) As Kulick and Rydström also pointed out, one of the causes of frustration and conflict in the sexuality of disabled people is that they are seen
as innocent, asexual, or even sexually inferior. Lacking a full and satisfying sexual life, they are perpetually trapped in the liminal phase.

Does the theatre let them out? I think so. Through the use of theatre as a means of investigation and its subsequent staging, the show "Sagan om Liv och Lust" allows people with disabilities who suffer from this constraint to no longer be invisible. The forced liminality therefore finds an end: a passage opens that allows us to return to a condition of normality, by which I mean a full life, in which we can fully enjoy our rights and satisfy our own needs.

8.4.2 Dissensus

Furthermore, the show was performed in the Riksdag in Stockholm on 3rd May 2017. That was a very important step for bringing the message to those who, in effect, have the power to change things legislatively. Not only was the performance given: also presented was the entire context in which it was developed. KulturParken states that:

We see a huge methodological problem in most of the studies conducted with people with intellectual disabilities. Polls and citizen dialogues are rarely accessible to this target group, and therefore the group is largely excluded from public statistics and influence in society. We believe that our methods can be of great use in all areas where you seriously want to find out what people with intellectual disabilities think.22 (KulturParken 2018)

Thanks to the actions of the various working groups and the theatrical practice of exploration and communication, various formulations and proposals have been put forward for the possible resolution of the problem. However, "there is no common selection of proposals, so there is no common manifesto." (KulturParken 2018) As stated in Chapter 2, the problem of sexuality among disabled people is not easy to solve. What becomes evident during the workshops are the common problems and how "it is painfully clear that the LSS group largely denies sexual and reproductive health and rights." At the same time, we can see multiple constructive ideas for improvements, as "many suggestions and thoughts return in different forms." (KulturParken 2018)

Over a hundred people with mainly intellectual disabilities have been involved in the production of suggestions for relationships changes. Sexuality could finally be counted when we talk about the fundamental rights of the LSS to have "a life like others." Locally in the municipality of Uppsala, proposals will be used as a basis for guidelines and supporting documents for staff in LSS operations. We will also present concrete proposals to SKL, the Ministry of Social Affairs,

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22 Translation by the author
the National Health Council, the Agency for Participation and the Public Health Authority, to the municipalities and regions that were present at our conferences. – Nanna

The 116 people taking part in the “Jag Har Lust!” conference were association’s members, LSS personnel, service staff, and politicians. The conference ended with their participation in various thematic working groups based on the proposals of the LSS participants. Each of these groups had a moderator and a secretary, together with a member having his or her own LSS decision, emphasizing the constant presence of the people directly involved in all phases of the work.

What we experience in this context is similar, I believe, to what Rancière assumes when he talks about political dissensus. (Rancière 2015) Indeed, for Rancière, politics develops through what people do on a collective rather than an individual level, especially when their actions challenge the hierarchical order of a given set of social arrangements. Implementing such a negotiation challenging this hierarchy presupposes a shared idea of equality. (Rancière 2015)

In our case, the dissensus concerns people with disability who have been presupposed to be unequal in this particular hierarchical order. The purpose is to disrupt not only the power arrangements of the social order, but also the power relations.

There is dissensus when the relationship between sensible perception and signification is transformed, when words no longer agree in the same way to other words, to other images, when times do not have the same effect. (Rancière 2015)

I think the idea around dissensus can be deeply connected to the concept of social drama, and that is the reason why the actions implemented by the KulturParken association are related to it too. Unfortunately, my time was insufficient to observe what happened next, or to learn which changes are at work in the society. It would be interesting to see what will evolve on a bigger level as well, including how the community itself develops further, how the government reacted to this theatrical work, and what it is doing now in regard to the matter. Ultimately, however, something was created, and something significant was grown. Once again, I want to use Rancière’s words:

There is someone who speaks and tries to communicate something to people who will not necessarily receive it as a knowledge, but will eventually integrate it into their thought process: this is what Jacotot called "an intellectual adventure". This is the idea of art. (…) What is important is the shift of the relationship between knowledge and ignorance, between a word and another word, between an act of creation and another act of creation. – (Rancière 2016)
8.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have shown what happened during the theatrical communication process, focusing on the social level of its impact.

I stressed the importance of the KulturParken association’s purpose, with its wish of people with disability’s issues being visible and the barrier of silence that surrounds them being broken. Workshops are an effective way to teach about important aspects of sexuality, and the KulturParken staff do so in a very easy and open way, showing sex for what it should be, beyond its aim of biological reproduction. I also presented the creation of the communitas that the rituality of theatre brought forth, with a link between art and politics that led to the development of a new network of relationships.

Lastly, I presented an overview of the profound changes that are taking place here. First, the theatre breaks the liminal status of disability imposed by society, making people with disability visible and no longer confined in a bubble alien to reality. Secondly, the theatrical work of “Sagan om Liv och Lust” generates what Rancière calls dissensus, in order to challenge the hierarchical order that sees people with disability as being subordinate to institutions. I am aware that this last part in particular still needs to be investigated, as the analysis presented here is only a beginning.
In this study I have analysed how a theatrical performance assisted the communication process from the "disabled" to the "able-bodied" context, showing and thus allowing us to face the social problem of the sexuality of people with disabilities in the Swedish setting. In the 5th chapter (on ethnography), I applied the concept of embodied knowledge (Csordas 1990; Forgasz 2015; Merleau-Ponty 2013) to explore the creative process of the KulturParken theatrical company, with the intent to investigate their identity through their use of theatrical exercises and dance and to see how shared discoveries permit spectators to understand the others’ perspective. Also, I have used myself as a tool in order to better understand these concepts. In Chapter 6, I showed how the sacral aspect of art shows us the deeper reality of the world around us. Next I used the ritual theory of performance (Turner 1986; 1988; 2017): firstly, to frame the artistic work of KulturParken by analysing a typical rehearsal day; and secondly, to identify the same pattern during the Premiere evening. These two chapters allowed me to develop the further discussion in Chapters 7 and 8, in which I presented the different challenges and changes the actors had to face and go through — from overcoming prejudice and passing through the direct involvement of the spectators in the social drama phenomena (Turner 1986), to the wished-for shift in power relations. With the term actors, I refer here not only to the real actors of the KulturParken company, but also to the participants at the Premiere and the conference who, as demonstrated in Chapter 7, are actors themselves.

When I started this study in the winter of 2017, I was totally unaware of the social problem I would face. I had in mind something more philosophical, less concrete, with all the consequent problems of focus that this entailed. In a sense, the envisioned study was less useful, and much more vague. Then I clashed with this reality, which silently takes place day after day and of which many are not even aware. The right to live and express a satisfying sexuality, in a consenting way and according to one’s own inclinations, is a right that has been recognized as being basic for living a full life and being a complete human being. (Kulick and Rydström 2015:49) The fact that this right is lacking for people with disabilities in Sweden, a country considered avant-garde for its inclusive philosophy and pledge of a good lifestyle, is a proof of two factors. Kulick and Rydström clearly showed them in their study: (1) how deeply rooted the prejudice is in our daily thinking and (2) how certain topics are still considered a serious taboo, and should be passed over in silence. In truth, here we could refer not only to Sweden, but extend the problem to other states. For instance, I could speak for my experience in Italy, where the problem of sexual assistance for people with disabilities is once again brought back to an ethical and moral dimension that confines the possibility of finding a solution.

Meeting the association KulturParken allowed me to put my feet on the ground and face an uncomfortable reality that involves us on several levels. The recognition and implementation of the right
to live and express one's sexuality is a question that affects us all. And the issue of prejudice, which here is considered precisely in the perspective of people with disabilities, is a shadow that unfolds itself over all social strata.

At the same time, I wanted to talk about art in my study, and this was something I did not want to give up. For this reason, my thesis develops on two levels: a more general one, concerning the artistic process of the KulturParken association itself; and a more specific one, directed to an analysis of the changes that the artistic process brought to the social problem faced. Below I will draw the conclusions on both of these levels, while addressing the main research questions posed in the introductory chapter of this thesis:

- How does the KulturParken association use art to investigate and show the problem of sexuality suffered by people with disabilities? How does this activity bring changes within society and create a new community?

9.1 Talking through the body - reprise

Communication was one of the fundamental elements on which I based my research, since a process of rapprochement between two apparently foreign entities may start right through it, to overcome the barrier of miscommunication that the strangeness of the two worlds can imply. By manifesting the baggage of shared values that the communicative process creates, different implications or actions can be implemented by the receiver (Barfield 2000): a feeling deep inside, the decision of a practical action to achieve a goal, or a social struggle (as in our case).

The company of KulturParken is a very special environment in which to apply the concept of embodied knowledge, since the different physicalities of the individual are made even more peculiar by the uniqueness of its actors (who have a diagnosis of ADHD, CP, and so forth). However, this is precisely one of the strengths of their communicative expressivity. Furthermore, the use of the body as a tool for analysis within this group means that its members can experience situations they have never faced before, while becoming aware of their limitations and developing a firm will to overcome them. Lukas, Ellinor, Nathalie, and Sara showed and taught me that the limit is only in our heads. The materiality of the body is a consequence.

At the same time, the union of the body as an instrument of investigation (Csordas 1990) and the ritual of the theatrical practice (Turner 1988) extended over time (thanks to the repetition of the days of rehearsal) enabled a deeper knowledge of the members, including the sharing of such knowledge and an exchange/interchange of the identities of the actors themselves. It is precisely here that the abstract and ideal world — the "out" world (Jackson 2016) — is anchored to the material one through the process
of repeated embodiment during the *liminal* phase of the rite. The fluidity of identity, the exchange of perspectives and points of view, the creation of new characters (meaning by this term the characters on stage, but also the development of a new confidence and the character of the person him- or herself) is one of the most interesting elements of theatrical practice: ”Theatre allows me not to belong anywhere, not to be anchored to a single perspective, to stay in transition.” (Barba 2017) Also, the reality that is told in this case is a daily reality that we live closely. The power of this storytelling lies precisely in this: it is a situation that could also involve us, in the most disparate ways: as a person with disabilities, as a parent, as a caregiver, as a partner in love, as a perfect stranger, as someone that for one reason or other is just defined as *non-normal*... We can all recognize ourselves on that stage, and here is where the communication process succeeds.

**9.2 Let it change!**

Of course, the creative process and its rituals can also be applied to other contexts. Nevertheless, there are some particularities that affect this specific case. I'm talking about what happened after the creative phase inside the company: namely, when the artistic product came out of the rehearsal room to meet the social reality that generated it. This encounter concerns the second phase I wanted to analyse in my study: the “common world” (Rancière 2016) of shared values, which we have seen takes on consistency thanks to the communicative process of the show “Sagan om Liv och Lust” and the community it created. In this scenario, *community* is an elusive term, and I also realize that it is potentially confusing. In fact, one of the results achieved by this study is precisely the realization of how, in this case, a community *ex novo* was not created, as I initially thought was possible. Rather, what happened was a profound change in the already existing one. This change took place on two different and complementary fronts, in a sort of *matryoshka* (nesting dolls) community. *In primis* is the most focused community (A), which revolves around the specific problem of disability and sexuality and which actively participated in the project (and thanks to it continues to develop and grow. Second is the wider community (B), the one in which the problem stagnates day after day and where the previous community moves and acts precisely to bring about a change.

If A implements a change and develops stronger bonds thanks to an increase in the projects that involve it, then B in a certain sense undergoes change through the action of the first. At this second level the intent of the project “Rätten att leva mitt liv” is manifested. The members of the KulturParken association, especially the directors and administrators, are aware of their limitations: the problem of sexuality among people with disabilities is still not solved. Indeed, they themselves do not claim to be able to find a solution, given the complex nature of the problem. Nevertheless, they are constantly driven by a deep desire for experimentation and challenge and are aware of the potential of theater as a means of expression and investigation. Furthermore, they are profoundly confident in the ability of their project
to open a breach in the ignorance that hovers around the issue of sexuality, and at the same time create awareness among the same people with LSS decisions.

I believe this is their main goal. The consciousness of one's being and the overcoming of prejudice is a great achievement that involves the idea of disability art (Millett-Gallant 2010; Boys 2017). In this case, what we see is a change in thinking about people with disabilities: they are not the problem, and their disability is not something to feel guilty about or ashamed of. This is an important fact. In theory this idea has been explained exhaustively through the social model of disability and disability studies (Oliver 1995; Siebers 2008). Yet it is one thing to read about it speculatively in an essay, while it is another to make the people involved accept this idea and put it into practice in everyday life. In my opinion, in this sense the disability aesthetic (Siebers 2010) becomes the key solution: the perception of disability as weakness is supplanted by the discovery — and/or rediscovery — of a beauty intrinsic to the human being, which finds its own existence rooted not only in the embodiment of one's physical level, but also at a deeper level, where sense and sentiment are combined'.

Moreover, in this context, the staging of the problem treated, structured also through the use of the workshops, creates an impact on and involvement of the public that makes the communication process even more effective. In this sense, the ritual of the KulturParken’s artistic work does not end after rehearsals or at the fall of the curtain, but it continues beyond. In fact, many of my informants have said that the play is just the first step in the communication process. On one side, their being spectators made them miss the process of investigation through the body that the actors experienced during the months of rehearsal; on the other they underwent this same process during the liminal phase of the staging, when — becoming one with the actors through identification with them — they received those embodied emotions and took charge of them. In realizing that they are themselves actors in a social drama, they also realize the importance of this role. Thus, the importance of the shared word (in itself fundamental for the success of projects involving the active participation of community A’s members) lies also in the continuation of the message just received thanks to the theatrical medium, leading to the creation in community B of a new culture ground where ideas and awarenesses can grow. That very awareness, and the presence of this new fertile soil, become the key factors that allow the shift of power delineated in the last two ethnographic chapters.

9.3 Further research

Although my research presents several interesting results that could help in the development of new projects for facing social issues, further analyses are required to complete it in a more exhaustive way.
Firstly, in the analysis of the communication process I was able to focus on the Premiere evening only. However, I would have liked to follow the tour around Sweden as well, to understand how the message is perceived on an expanded level, especially after the staging at Riksdag, in Stockholm. Secondly, in the last chapter I presented a quick overview of changes in power relations relative to the problem of the sexuality of people with disability, focusing on the latter. I think it would be interesting and useful to analyse when and how these power relations change over a long period of time after the staging of the performance (focusing also on the same institutions and government offices relative to the disability context). Thirdly, I would like to follow the development of KulturParken association’s projects, keeping in mind the results of the previous one and the growth that the members of the company have experienced. Even more interesting would be to see what the theatre companies and culture cooperatives in this network of association do to create something together on a further level.

Lastly, I feel I must clarify the structure of the ritual analyzed here. Of course it can be applied to most theatrical contexts, which emphasizes the universality of the artistic mean of which I previously spoke, its being archetypal and a symbolic place that allows the implementation of the communication process. I believe it would be remarkable to analyse another kind of social issue that artistic expression proposes to face and see what kind of new cultural ground would emerge.
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Appendix – Pictures

Figure 1 - The cast of Sagan om Liv ok Lust (Photo: Fredrik Sederholm for KulturParken)

Figure 2 - Circle of Sharing
Figure 3 - The day I became a doll

Figure 4 - Destiny and Lukas just before the dance performance at the conference
Figure 6 Première at Gottsunda Dans & Teater (Photo KulturParken)

Figure 5 Sagan om Liv och Lust at the Riksdag (Photo: Malin Beeck / ETC Uppsala 2017)
Figure 7 - Minina, "the world expert of everything".