



# POWER. PEACE. POETRY

**Gender [in]justice in times of polarisation**

**INSTEAD OF A GUIDELINE**

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## Preliminary Remarks

This text is the result of a cooperation between colleagues from organisations in Germany, Estonia, France, Ireland and Poland. Under the title "**Power. Peace. Poetry. Women's Perspectives on Society's Divisions**", came adult educators from different (educational) biographies, types of organisations (district centre, association, small company) and social contexts together to relate gender issues and the crises of the present days. Crises permeate gender relations, they can go hand in hand with both a return to traditional patterns and an emancipation push towards equality.

The focus of our collaboration was on women in the sense of their biological sex and the social, cultural and political conditions in the past and present as they are organised from this. Queer, trans and other aspects were not touched upon. The **aim** was to learn from each other how women can be empowered to make themselves (more) visible and to confront discrimination. Two topics, **visibility** and **dealing with discrimination**, were mainly taken into consideration. Nevertheless, issues of antifeminism and feminism were not left out and are also reflected in Part I of this paper. However, we do not offer a "guide against antifeminism", as there are now guides against right-wing extremism provided. Why? Our concern is not to perpetuate a confrontation, let alone to make a person an "enemy" just because s/he behaves in an exclusionary or discriminatory way. As much as structural and personal discrimination up to violence is to be rejected, this would mean reinforcing polarisations or creating new ones. This could also mean generalising from one concrete behaviour to the characteristics of a person as a whole, thus feeding the formation of stereotypes and possibly even prejudices. We know that people consist of many facets, that they are products of their time and social conditions – just like ourselves. Therefore, the focus is on being able to draw **clear boundaries** on the one hand. This is still a "classic" topic for women. On the other hand, the view should be kept open for the **possibility of change**. This also concerns the "oppressors", and change can best take place not only against them, but with them. This is not to advocate harmony, but also not to cultivate alienation. The decision depends on the situation and how it is assessed. And of course on one's own state of mind at that moment. **Creative solutions are needed**. And what applies to "big politics" in the face of war and crisis also applies to the actions of citizens.

**With this text we would like to encourage this. Part I** may inspire to understand facets of gender {in}justice in the context of anti-feminism, feminism and social divisions. Knowledge and critical thinking raise awareness, and understanding contexts inspires the development of new ways. **Part II** contains suggestions for exercises to strengthen women's creative potential and their ability to express themselves.

**Power. Peace. Poetry:** Overcoming powerlessness, feeling one's own power (competence, ability), developing self-confidence, avoiding small-mindedness – the poetry of narrative chains, self-composed stories, photographic explorations, collage techniques, free theatre play and much more

may contribute to this. The orientation towards peace is the unifying element, goal and path at the same time. May this triad be felt when reading the text.

## I. Power: Gender relations as democracy relations

### Gender justice: promoted here, contested there

Warum diese Überlegungen? Diskriminierung und das **Unsichtbarmachen** von Frauen dürften sich seit mehreren tausend Jahren ereignen.<sup>1</sup> Countless treatises on the "unease of gender" have been written, including studies of patriarchy with its mental and economic structures that enable women's inferiority. There are papers on sexism, violence, and racism, as well as emancipation from these forms of oppression. So why another text?

The struggle for gender equality is oriented towards the democratisation of society as a whole and the promise of republican law to enable **freedom AND equality** for all. For women, its realisation was and still is ambivalent, fragile and in various respects only partially given. Currently (2022) we live in times of war, crisis, upheaval and society's change, that is, a change in the framework conditions. In these, gender arrangements are also changing. They can be accompanied by more equality, but also by a relapse into "traditional" role understandings and exclusions, or both. **Democracy, including gender democracy, is not something that can simply be consumed.** It needs people who make up their own minds, have their say, and get involved. For this reason alone, another treatise on gender justice is relevant. Especially one that takes into account the multi-layered crises from a European, i.e. transnational, perspective and does not content itself with talking about old-fashioned friend-foe schemes.

**Europe is currently facing various economic, social and political crises.** Think of the instability and intransparency in the financial industry, the growing economic power of large corporations (Google, Amazon, Facebook / Meta, Apple, Microsoft, BlackRock, Vanguard, etc.) and their influence on media and political debates (which is of course itself open to discussion), digitalisation and the shift to surveillance capitalism, ecological disasters, global warming, and secure access to resources such as gas and oil as well as energy supply in general). Social security is threatened for many citizens in Europe and peace can no longer be taken for granted. Public discourses reflect these multiple crises. They are also "driven" by interpretations of social conflicts that are accompanied by the devaluation of certain population groups. At the same time, trust in public institutions, the media, politicians and the "elites" is declining.

**Gender equality is questioned by some and pushed by others.** At the same time, the gender pay gap remains large, and domestic violence, sexual exploitation, discrimination in the labour market and the under-representation of women in leadership positions are still real in European countries. Rights that women in European countries fought for and took for granted are disappearing again in

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<sup>1</sup> However, as research on the Danubian civilisation and discussions about its matristic or materiachal character show, this cannot be generalised for past cultures. Cf. Lüpke, 2023 and Hagl, 2013

some countries, such as childcare options, the possibility of anonymous abortion or the increasing hostility towards economically and intellectually independent women.

Those who advocate for gender justice complain of an emerging anti-feminism. What is meant by this? And what does feminism mean?

### What does anti-feminism mean?

The term refers to individual statements, social movements or social, political, philosophical and religious ideas and currents that oppose **feminism as a theory** and the **emancipation of women**. It is as old as the aspirations for female emancipation and gender justice themselves. Antifeminism thus negates the validity of freedom and equality for women (and genders other than the male) on both a theoretical and practical level. The term, like the definition of feminism, is very broad.

**Anti-feminism can be seen as an expression of a contradictory claim to the emancipation of human beings in a constitutional state.** Because the principle of freedom and equality as the central base of democracy had been reserved only for men by almost all Enlightenment thinkers of the 17th century and later. For Immanuel Kant, too, the possibility of participation resp. co-determination applied only to men and, in addition, to those who had property (with the distant prospect that all would be able to acquire property and help guide the fate of the polity).<sup>2</sup> The idea of freedom and equality, however, was in the world. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, "anti-feminist" boundaries set by itself were overcome and successively fought for women's freedom and equality as well. Antifeminism therefore refers to ruptures and inconsistencies of the 18th century Enlightenment, but also to its successes. The 19th and 20th centuries knew strong women's movements in Europe: women's suffrage, the right to (university) education and joint education for girls and boys, to employment, equal pay for equal work, the recognition of women as intellectual equals and much more were their demands. This provoked anti-feminist counter-movements, also from women. (In Germany, for example, there was a "League against Women's Emancipation".) Misogynist statements attributed to Friedrich Nietzsche became well-known. Race-theoretical, eugenic and anti-Semitic ideas of the 19th and 20th centuries also go hand in hand with an assumed inferiority of women. Their exclusion from the public sphere, making them invisible, denying them their own voice, made this assumed inferiority possible in the first place. Male alliances and "rope teams" in politics, the media, churches and companies also contributed to this. The liberation of women towards more equality and gender justice and the development towards a society of equals taking into account differences was and is therefore not by chance characterised by women stepping out of isolation, making themselves public and joining forces.

Contemporary anti-feminist debates, strategies and campaigns also indicate an anti-emancipatory direction. They openly or implicitly reveal a **male claim to power**. In particular, the "**gender ideology**" described as such is rejected. Gender studies at universities, "diverse" gender, also homosexuality, are considered incompatible with convictions of what is "normal". Examples can be found in the party programmes and statements of politicians of various right-wing conservative or

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2 Kant, Immanuel

right-wing extremist parties in Europe. Protagonists of the gender discourse, in turn, categorise such views as "endangering democracy", "right-wing extremist", "anti-diversity". Anti-feminism could be a "bridging ideology" to carry politically right-wing ideas into the centre of society.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, it can be assumed that supporters of very conservative and right-wing or extreme right-wing parties and currents cultivate a traditional, patriarchal image of women and the family. In addition, on blogs and in internet forums, but also through "real" gatherings, individuals and groups are active who consciously cultivate "masculinity". This almost always goes hand in hand with a relegation of women to the point of misogyny. The various, heterogeneous initiatives are summarised under terms like that of the "**manosphere**".

One of them is the so-called "**incels**". The term stands for "involuntary celibate", meaning that men live involuntarily without a partner and without sexual contact. This is often accompanied by violent fantasies and acts of violence against women. The perpetrators of the Toronto (Canada) rampage in 2018 or the attack on the synagogue and a snack stand in Halle (Germany) in 2019 were so-called incels. Researchers see the high propensity to violence among other things in feelings of loneliness and alienation, the problem that incels are often unemployed, experience themselves as powerless and not attractive. These perceptions reflect the deficits of the current economic and social system, which are, however, blamed on women. Demonising these people makes little sense, as it would deepen polarisation. It is more appropriate to offer alternative group contexts so that people can feel they belong.<sup>4</sup>

**However, differentiations are appropriate.** Not everyone who expresses criticism of "gender ideology" is automatically to be located in the right-wing political spectrum. Nor does this criticism have to correspond to a rejection of gender justice. But it does have to correspond with a rejection of the neoliberal impositions in the context of which "gender ideology" is seen. There can therefore be a danger of classifying as "right-wing" and "endangering democracy" what is (government-)critical and therefore belongs to a lively, democratic culture of debate. If one neglects this "fine distinction", there is a danger of ignoring a central element of democracy, that of opposition, and thus of counteracting the conditions for more gender justice in a way that is itself "dangerous to democracy".

**If one asks for explanations for anti-feminist currents,** they are also understood as a reflex to the neoliberal economic and social policies of the last 30 years.<sup>5</sup> This may be plausible if one understands by it a systematic implementation of insecurity, which for a not insignificant part of European societies is accompanied by insecure pensions, precarious employment, weak trade unions, fear of social decline, the dethematisation of the political, a generalising perspective on society from the entrepreneurial point of view, and so on. Insecurity awakens the need for stability. And this can be sought in authoritarian and patriarchal patterns. In addition, according to political scientist Eszter Kováts, "gender ideology", feminism and women who succeed are perceived as

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3 o.N., Antifeminismus begegnen – Demokratie stärken

4 Logan, Caitlin with reference to Schaefer Lasse, Max

5 Kaiser, Susanne

part of neoliberal political strategies and are held jointly responsible for the social damage they cause.<sup>6</sup>

In this view, it is paradoxically the **linking of neoliberalism and feminism** that creates social divisions, although they should be made redundant through more gender justice and gender diversity. Also, gender debates and advocacy for LGBTQ rights can become a projection screen for a general unease with society. In the absence of a clear addressee for this unease, they can function as a proxy for it. These social and political contexts should be taken into consideration when countering anti-feminism.

## What means feminism?

When talking about anti-feminism, the question arises: What does feminism mean?

The Cambridge Dictionary says: "The belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state."<sup>7</sup>

In her article "What is feminism?"<sup>8</sup> Dr. Ilse Lenz sums up the basic assumption of all feminist movements: **Self-determination, freedom and equal rights** for all people in both public and personal life. She states a diversity of approaches and therefore speaks of feminisms.

**The term feminism first appeared at the end of the 19th century.** It became established in the course of the new women's movements from 1968 onwards. Different perspectives of gender critique are characteristic. It refers to equal rights in education, work and relationships as well as individual self-determination over the body, sexuality and having children. Criticism of the lack of gender justice is usually also understood as criticism of the society as a whole.

Ilse Lenz systematises the differences between the various approaches on the basis of the following questions:

- **Gender dimension:** What understanding of gender is represented? Is the focus on universal equality or is the accent placed on the difference between women and men? Is gender understood as socially and culturally constructed?
- **Society dimension:** What picture of the existing society is drawn? What social problems are identified that stand in the way of gender justice?
- **Intersectional dimension:** What other inequalities (class, ethnicity, etc.) are seen, and how is the connection to gender relations described?<sup>9</sup>

Following this distinction, different currents are distinguished: liberal feminism, difference feminism, radical difference feminism, conservative feminism, socialist feminism, anarchist

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6 Kováts, Eszter

7 Cambridge Dictionary, article „feminism“

8 Lenz, Ilse

9 Lenz, Ilse

feminism, transformative feminism, care feminism, eco-feminism, postcolonial feminism, discourse-theoretical feminism, queer feminism and others. The different feminist perspectives and currents reflect and initiate social changes at the same time.

A central issue is that of violence against women. Feminism would therefore be a given if no woman or girl in the world was exposed to male violence on the basis of her gender or had to be afraid of it.

### **Christina Thürmer-Rohr**

Of the many feminists, one should be acknowledged: Christina Thürmer-Rohr (\*1936). She offers inspiration for our project. Thürmer-Rohr is a social scientist (philosophy, psychology) and was a professor at the Technical University of Berlin from 1972-2005. She founded the research focus "Women's Studies" in 1976. Likewise, she is active as a pianist and was the singer of the women's band "Außerhalb" („outside“).

Ms Thürmer-Rohr argues that women encounter their time in a **foreign** and **unbound** way, that they are homeless. They had the experience of not belonging and saw themselves as not being located. Thürmer-Rohr triggered controversy when she spoke of **women's complicity** in the patriarchal system. Women are not exclusively victims of patriarchy. Rather, their actions serve the system. Feminism therefore means swimming against the tide. "*The mainstream is a pathetic and, moreover, not a harmless body of water.*"<sup>10</sup>

For her, this also has a political dimension. "**Feminism is criticism of the society**", Thürmer-Rohr said, linking this to understanding the present. This also includes knowledge of the past. Following Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) and her concept of **plurality**, she advocates "*understanding people in the plural rather than the singular and recognising diversity*". This is "synonymous with '**love to the world**'".<sup>11</sup> Thürmer-Rohr also takes over the idea of "bottomlessness" from Hannah Arendt. This existential experience can trigger one's own independent thinking. Women should allow this. It is about "*existentially motivated learning with an open outcome, about the attempt to experiment at the pain threshold*"<sup>12</sup>.

This is not a lonely searching, discovering and trying. Thürmer-Rohr favours **friendship** "(...) or *befriending the world and caring for the world through befriending different people*". In this, "*... the freedom of consent to the other becomes clear*".<sup>13</sup>

**Thürmer-Rohr's reflections are up to date.** They also inspire the European exchange between women. Because they have not only get to know the experience of being foreign in their own country. At the same time, they can get to know themselves as strangers who have been socialised in different European countries - in countries where the situation for women is very different. The recognition of plurality is the prerequisite for being able to enjoy the charm of the encounters; it is lived and experienced precisely because the **difference is conscious**. On this basis, women can

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10 Siebrasse, Brigitte

11 Siebrasse, Brigitte

12 Siebrasse, Brigitte

13 Thürmer-Rohr, 2003, S.90 in: Czollek / Perko



learn from each other, further develop their own thinking along their own - accepted - perceptions, experiment, express themselves, change the world in love for the world. They can create free-spaces for free-spirit to try, to grow, to rub, to mature.

But this does not happen in a vacuum, but in the context of society's divisions. The relationship of the different genders to each other is determined by these divisions and reproduces them at the same time.

## Gender relations and society's divisions

The problems are accumulating, they are occurring simultaneously and with increased intensity:

- The further increasing **concentration of wealth** and the growing number of people who have to live in poverty and precarious situations threaten social stability, the foundations of democracy (the enjoyment of rights, political participation), lead to a lack of overall economic prosperity, increased segregation in cities and much more.
- **Access to resources** (energy, food), loss of biodiversity, global warming; destruction of nature, inequality in access to resources and in causing the problems,
- shift to an **all-digital networked world** exploiting the human body, i.e. transcending biological boundaries through the use of technology (artificial intelligence; transhumanism), spread of an economy of surveillance and control,
- **geopolitical power shifts** between large state actors such as Russia, China or the USA, increasing influence of large corporations (Facebook/Meta, BlackRock and others), certain foundations and informal associations on political events ("power without a mandate") and thereby loss of democratic influence,
- **discursive polarisation** in struggles for interpretive sovereignty using generalised attributions (e.g. "conspiracy ideologue") especially when opinions are expressed that are different from government narratives; this promotes the alienation of population groups with the consequence of a lack of social dialogue, unused possibilities of understanding and an under-complex perception of the situation.

In this environment of profound changes, also of democracy, two issues remain relevant for the struggle for (more) gender justice: **1. the invisibility of women** or female achievements and **2. the open and covert discrimination of women**, their exclusion, degradation and, in the sense of Thürmer-Rohr's "complicity", their collaboration.

For both dimensions, examples can be given in both personal and structural dimensions, whereby the boundaries are often fluid: **Structural invisibility** happens when women in the professional world feel the "glass ceiling" and the bosses' chairs are occupied by others. Or when it is said: "The woman is silent in the congregation."<sup>14</sup> Invisibility on a **personal level** occurs when situations are

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<sup>14</sup> Literally: "Let your wives be silent in the church meetings ..." (The Bible, 1 Cor 14:33b-35). The sentence is certainly to be understood against the background of the culture in the ancient world. Nevertheless, it left deep

perceived in relation to the gender of the acting persons. For example, when a person is recognised as an authority because he is a man and also wealthy. What would the view be if a woman, with a low income, were the agent?

**Structural discrimination** manifests itself, among other things, in the gender pay gap and the wage structure. In female-dominated professions, the salary is significantly lower than in those that are mainly perceived by men. Finally, discrimination on the **personal level** refers, for example, to a lack of safety for women in public spaces, acceptance based on appearance, focus on deficits instead of strengths.

The Western European emancipation movements from the 1970s onwards have led to clear **successes** for more gender equality. At the same time, **uncertainty** arose about the "right" behaviour between the sexes/gender. Quite a few men also see themselves under pressure from role expectations. Nevertheless, patterns in dealing with power continue to be discernible. Put simply: Men often overestimate their power potential and are then unsettled when reality does not confirm this. Women, on the other hand, too often see too little of their power potential and underestimate it. In other words: Even in our days, **gender relations are permeated by power relations**. On a **personal level** - e.g. the division of labour in the household -, on a **political level** - e.g. the abortion law or the infrastructure of childcare facilities -, on an **economic level** - economic independence of women and men and equal wages for equal work, on the **level of discourses** - gender is often associated with social and political codes, such as those cultivated by certain parties in Germany (Social Democrats, Greens, parts of the Left Party). Therefore, it can happen that identity-political concepts are rejected rather than the issue of gender justice per se. This makes it more difficult to talk about gender issues across social discourse boundaries.

It is these "surrounding conditions", the context of social, economic and political systems as well as current developments, through which gender justice becomes possible or not possible (or both). Understanding the whole, the contexts, structures, the big and the small worlds opens the horizon for possibilities even in the impossible.

### **Power. Peace. Poetry**

This triad condenses the horizon in which the colleagues from the partner organisations have worked together for two years, sharing their knowledge, perceptions, experiences and methodological skills and learning from each other. **Power:** This means the insight into power relations at various levels. In the context of our cooperation, it means **empowering** women (and men) to self-expression, self-efficacy and creating connections between people. **Peace:** Empowerment follows the idea of peace. Those who think for themselves, trust themselves, accept themselves and are able to relate can contribute to the peace project Europe and can use their power to peacefully confront divisions. This is also to avoid falling into the trap of suddenly defaming and marginalising others, even "for the good cause". **Poetry:** storytelling, composing sentences and stories together in "free-style chains", creating collages across different spaces, taking photographs and connecting what is taken with stories, exercises to experience

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traces over the centuries.

body and space, free theatre and much more - these methods are meant to empower women to draw boundaries when necessary and to seek intersections when possible. Below you will find descriptions of some of the methods.

## II. Peace and Poetry: other ways

### Strengthening visibility

#### Public spaces



Photo: Central station in Wrocław/Poland

The exclusion of women from the public sphere was and is a method practised over centuries to make their abilities, achievements, opinions, power and ideas invisible. At the same time, a public space can be a site of violence against women. Public discussion, in turn, is a first step to change a situation. For women and men.

We invited people in the project group and via Facebook to take photos of public places of their own choice. Those who wanted to could add a text to the photos.

#### The public call

*The underground, the backyard, the supermarket, the museum, the library, the big square, the pub, the concert hall, the street, the workplace, but also Facebook, Instagram and Twitter: people move in public spaces. How do they perceive them? What feelings and reflections, what fears, doubts, hopes and dreams do they trigger in them? What is their understanding of these spaces for the public life of society, for the political, for the possibility of participation and co-determination? Do women experience public spaces differently than men?*

*We invite you to explore public spaces with your camera / smartphone, take photos and write down your own associations, feelings and thoughts about them. Every word, every picture counts. The inner censor is welcome to take a break. Simply express what comes to your mind. And see what emerges.*

#### Results

Most of the photos were published in the [online gallery on the project website](#).

## Exchange

Each person presents at least one picture s/he has taken. S/he explains why s/he chose this motif. S/he tells a story that is connected to it for him/her. This can be an experience. Or an invented story. Or a poem. Or ...

Images and stories can have great power. There should therefore be enough time to share them. It is not just that one person tells the story. The others can ask questions, make connections, give space to new questions.

The exchange in our group was very moving. It gave insights into destinies. We came closer to each other. And we discovered how strong the influence of the (Catholic) Church was and is on the shaping of women's lives in Ireland and in Poland. *"It is very encouraging to come together with other women. It helps me not to be isolated." "I have learnt every minute I have been here."* This is what participants said when looking back on the exchange.

## A collage as a „Gesamtkunstwerk“

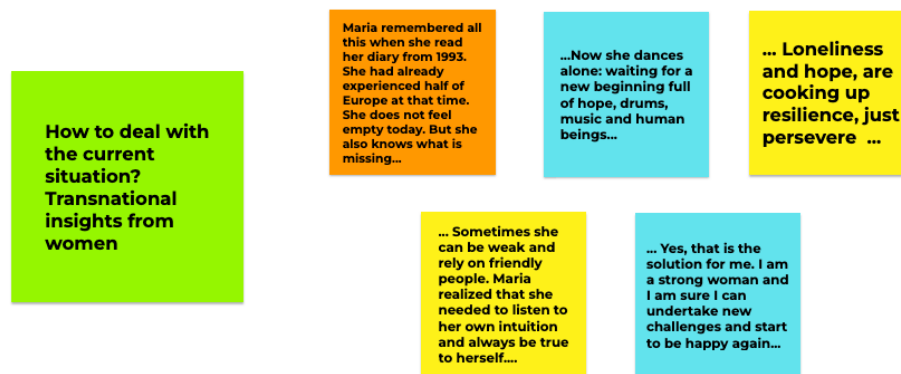


Making a collage is an invitation to create something freely. While doing it, thoughts and feelings arise that sometimes make you marvel at what you are capable of. Some think first and then realise the idea. Others develop the idea while they are creating something. Making a collage together allows something new to emerge. People can meet each other in a new way.

During the Europe-wide "Lockdown", working on a collage offered the opportunity to combine **virtual exchange with personal contact**. A contact that gives a sense of the geographical distances between the partner organisations. The participants agreed on one question. Ours was: **How do I cope with difficult situations (e.g. Corona crisis)?** For this, adult education trainers created a collage with adult learners from their organisations. This was then submitted to the post office.

Colleagues and learners from another partner organisation added their part. Until they made a journey from Warsaw to Marseille, to Berlin, to Wroclaw, to Tallinn and finally to Naas near Dublin. The result was a "Gesamtkunstwerk" (a total work of art). When everyone could see each other again, the large collage provided plenty of material for conversation. A simple method that sets something in motion. Read more on the project website: <http://wp.weltgewandt-ev.de>.

## Free style story chain



Ideas, associations, feelings, fantasies formed into words, strung together like pearls into a necklace: This is possible even virtually. And you can even create a story chain in a short and a long version. How? The participants agreed on a common question. Given the Corona "lockdown", it was this: "How do I deal with the current situation?"

The colleague from one partner organisation wrote a short story of about half an A4 page. The story was not shown to the others. The colleague left the last two sentences on a post on Jamboard. Another colleague followed up on the two sentences on Jamboard and wrote her own short story. She left the last two sentences on a post on Jamboard. The third, fourth, ... colleague did the same.

At the end, at a physical meeting (if necessary also virtually), the two finishing sentences of the stories were combined into a mini-story that seemed to make sense. Several variations (sequences of posts) were possible. Secondly, all the stories of each contributor were read out. First, in the order in which they were written. Then the order could be varied to give the overall composition a different meaning.

You can find a more detailed [description of the method on the project website](#).

Part of the results are [summarised in writing](#).

You can also [listen to the whole story](#).

## Free Theatre



Taking over the word, being there "with body and soul", giving shape to words with the body: Free theatre helps people to express themselves, to become recognisable, to make themselves visible. With the "Theatre of the Oppressed", Augusto Boal and his colleagues developed a variety of forms and methods that "empower" non-actors to bring their concerns on stage. The theatre meetings always begin with exercises for the perception of one's own body, of others and of the space. They can also be tried out on occasions other than theatre meetings.

Suggestions for exercises can be found on the website of a European project on [perceptions of history](#) and the website of a [cooperation on digitalisation](#).

### Other exercises

#### **No - but**

The participants form two rows. Those facing each other form a pair. The conversation is very simple and offers many possibilities to develop it with facial expressions, gestures, voice and movement. The participants in one row always say one word: "no". The participants in the other row also say only one word: "but". After a sometimes hesitant initial phase, a lively and cheerful "exchange" usually develops. After 5-7 minutes, the participants change the word. Afterwards, it is advisable to ask the participants how they felt about this exercise. What was it like to say "no"? How did they experience putting in their "but"?

#### **Combining gestures**

The participants stand in a circle. The trainer invites them to make a gesture on a simple topic, for example, the question "How am I doing?" Each participant in turn shows her/his gesture. The other participants watch attentively. Then the trainer suggests another question for gestures related to the theme (of the evening, the project, the seminar). Then the group walks around the room. Everyone shows their gesture again. The trainer says "stop". Those who are standing close to

each other at this moment form a small group (4-5 people). They combine the gestures of the individuals into a common sequence. After about ten minutes, they present their mini-choreography to the whole group.

### **Building a living image**

If there is no stage, a part of the room is designated as such. The trainer invites the participants to build a picture together. S/he gives a keyword, e.g. "machine". One by one the participants go on stage and represent the function of a machine. For example, a cogwheel that turns, a conveyor belt, and so on. Each adds his/her own component to the others' representations. In the end, a machine picture is created. Keywords can also be: Name of the district / a place, "orchestra", "family", "work", the project theme and many more.

NOTE: All three of the above exercises should be introduced after a few simple exercises to start.

### **Sociometry**

The physician, psychiatrist, sociologist and therapist Jakob Levy Moreno (1889 - 1974) developed, among other things, the methods of sociometry, psychodrama, sociodrama and group psychotherapy. [Some information about Moreno can be found here.](#)

Sociometric exercises can be used to get to know each other, but also for feedback. They can also be used to illustrate topics in the room and to ask for the views of the participants. You will find a [description of this method](#) using the example of a "Group Picture Europe".

### **Sociodrama**

Sociodrama allows to discover new ways of speaking and acting. It is suitable for addressing issues and conflicts of a group or the society. For example, social problems such as housing shortage and rising rents, democracy and how to participate, exclusion, bullying, peace, the monetary system, gender justice, etc. The participants try to slip into someone else's shoes (a role they have chosen themselves). They experience new perspectives. This awakens a deeper understanding of issues and problems related to a social topic and society.

Guided by a trainer, the participants first agree on a common question. They then agree on the location of the action (on the beach, on the TV tower, in the underground shaft, on Berlin's Alexanderplatz?). Each person chooses his/her own role. In the interview with the trainer, this character gets more clear. The other participants understand better "who" they are playing with. And then: go on stage, improvise!

After the play there is time for reflection. The players can stay in their roles.

Another way of playing sociodrama is [described in this exercise.](#)



## Countering discrimination

In a situation where you or other people or groups are being discriminated (belittled, disadvantaged), it is important to have presence of mind and courage. In unusual events there are at least three ways to react: a) be aggressive, b) flee, c) freeze. Often, it comes down to either a "fight mode" or a harmony strategy by keeping silent and making oneself invisible (on the women's side). Both ways are not really convincing. What alternatives could there be?

### Sentences to set limits

"I don't see it that way."

"I don't want you to talk to me like that."

"Pardon me, but now I am talking."

"I'm not finished yet. I want to finish."

"I don't want to discuss at this level."

"We are not getting anywhere on this level. What objections do you have on the merits?"

"Please cite supporting evidence."

"I am surprised by this statement."

"This is the first time I have heard this."

„Let me first think about it.“

With some humour:

"With the sun at your back, you can charm everyone."

"Better a dog on a leash than a stable without pigs."

**What phrases come to mind / to you? Which ones have stood the test of time?**

### Dialogue, not harmony: positive examples

What positive examples of successful dialogue can you think of?

Find a cosy place, take a piece of paper and pen and write them down. Just start writing, preferably without evaluating, non-stop, at least five minutes.

## Observe - evaluate

It is a fine art of communication to distinguish between observing and describing on the one hand and interpreting and evaluating on the other. This makes it easier to counter discrimination - without, if possible, discriminating oneself.

Here is an exercise that may help to develop empathy and tolerance towards other people's needs and to become aware of one's own needs. It also raises awareness of one's own values and opinions and how these shape interpretations of situations.

The trainer distributes definitions of observation and interpretation (several copies of the same definitions) around the room. S/he invites the participants to come together in pairs or small groups. They may choose definitions that are most convincing to them personally. To facilitate the discussion, the trainer asks the following questions to the participants:

- Why did you choose this definition?
- How would you define the terms "observe" and "evaluate" in your own words?
- Can you give an example of the definition you have chosen?
- What difficulties do you see in distinguishing between observation and interpretation?
- How could these difficulties be avoided?

### Definitions:

#### *Observation:*

A detailed study of phenomena prior to analysis, diagnosis or interpretation.

An act of recognising and noting a fact or event, often involving measurement with instruments.

A non-judgmental statement based on at least one of the five human senses.

Anything described as a video camera might record it is a non-judgemental observation.

(<https://leuchtturm-eltern.de/beobachtung>)

In observation, we focus our attention on what we can perceive with our senses. (<https://leuchtturm-eltern.de/beobachtung>)

#### *Interpretation:*

Connects sensory impressions with an evaluation and thus creates a conclusion from what is observed.

An explanation or conceptualisation of e.g. a text, a statement or a situation.

Giving meaning to a phenomenon or situation as a direct result of an observation.

When we evaluate, we focus our attention on what we think about the situation. (<https://leuchtturm-eltern.de/beobachtung>)

After this prelude, the trainer asks the participants to get back into pairs. They are asked to observe and describe the clothes of their counterpart. Each person has about five minutes to do so. Then they present their observations to the whole group. If the group has more than 15 participants, the presentation can be done in two larger groups. Together they consider whether the observations and descriptions are real or whether they have been interwoven with interpretations. (Example: "You are wearing a beautiful red scarf").

## **Needs - Strategies**

What we feel is closely related to our needs: "Feelings are like warning lights that indicate needs." They are the roots of our emotions. Understanding and accepting one's own needs (better) helps to be at peace with oneself and to be alive. Developing a sense for the needs of others in turn makes it easier to accept them as they are, it helps to understand them (better), even the oppressors. Understanding does not mean identifying!

What are needs? These can be: Peace, harmony, water, belonging, being seen, shelter, love, security, grief, autonomy, connection, joy, touch, lightness, trust, compassion, truthfulness and many more. Conflicts often arise when needs are not met.

Needs are not to be confused with **strategies**. These are concrete actions to fulfil a need. For example, someone may write an article about the current crises in Europe in order to fulfil the need for freedom of expression.

### Exercise

The trainer lays out cards with needs written on them. Lists of needs are available on the internet, [for example at this address](#).

The participants are asked to think silently for five (!) minutes about how they feel and what is on their mind at the moment. Those who wish can then talk about what is on their mind. The others listen, look at the needs' cards and pay attention to what needs are being addressed from their point of view. They share the needs with the person who spoke. The person then gives feedback on which of the words/needs resonated most with him/her.

This exercise requires that the participants can talk in a protected atmosphere. The trainer makes sure that the participants keep the needs in mind and hold themselves as free as possible from interpretations.

[Feel invited to explore more methods on the project website.](#)

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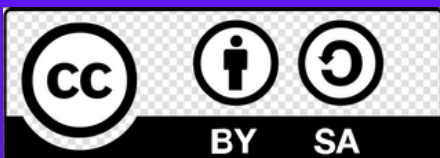


Find out more information about the project:  
[www.wp.weltgewandt-ev.de](http://www.wp.weltgewandt-ev.de)



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