

## **A VERY SIMPLE PIECE: GOLDILOCKS 23332 A ONE-TO-ONE MENTORING EXPERIMENT ABOUT THE MARGINS AND LIMITS OF INDIVIDUALIZED METHODOLOGY FOR A UNIQUE NEED ARTIST PRESENTING AN INVISIBLE DISABILITY**

**Andrea Pagnes (VestAndPage)**

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## RESUMO

Este relato de experiência descreve um experimento de orientação individual que realizei em outubro de 2021 com o objetivo de enriquecer a prática performática de um ex-aluno meu: artista da performance não-binário britânico e *drag queen* Oozing Gloop (pronomes: eles/eles), diagnosticado com transtorno do espectro autista. No domínio das artes performativas, as respostas e o apoio à emergência da saúde mental e da neurodiversidade, em particular o autismo e a síndrome de Asperger (as chamadas deficiências invisíveis), continuam a ser insuficientes. No entanto, quando recebem o apoio certo, os artistas neurodivergentes geralmente são capazes de expressar um potencial criativo sem precedentes. O relatório é constituído por um anexo com a minuta do roteiro da performance final que resultou do processo de tutoria.

**Palavras-chave:** Artes cênicas; Teatro aplicado; Deficiências invisíveis; Síndrome de Asperger; Autismo.

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The three questions that always present themselves and I can never answer are: Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you want? Or worse:

How are you?

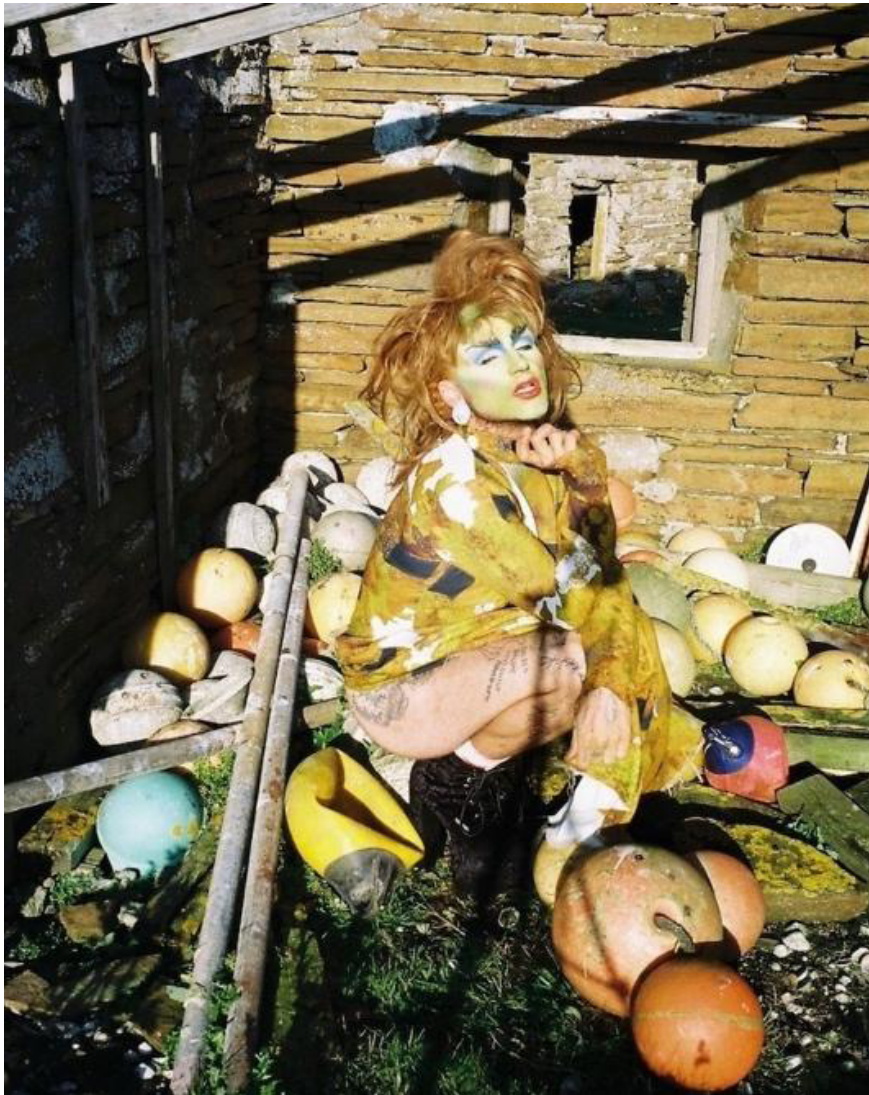
So, what about changing them with: What did you dream about last night?

Oozing Gloop

## **SITUATION**

Upon inquiry of a former British alumnus of mine, Oozing Gloop, who is on the autistic Asperger spectrum and had received a DYCP (a practice development grant from the Arts Council England) in December 2020, I drafted a three-week intensive mentoring process explicitly for them. I looked into methods and ways to facilitate their learning and creative growth during this period. Oozing Gloop are a non-binary, thirty-one years old, and a successful drag-queen artist (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Oozing Gloop's self-portrait



Oozing Gloop. Self-portrait. 2019. Photograph: Oozing Gloop. Courtesy the artist.

### *#Descrivipravocê*

*Fotografia colorida, em formato vertical, de uma artista não binária agachada sobre um gramado com várias bolas coloridas; está com olhos fechados e maquiagem no rosto, veste um tecido de cor amarela com detalhes na parte superior, enquanto suas pernas tatuadas estão visíveis e usa uma bota com salto. Ao fundo uma casa de tijolos. (Fim da descrição).*

I am aware that this is an individual case. However, it allowed me to outlook a more personalized approach towards assisting the artistic development of diversely-able young performers that is not only directed to commonly used schemes applied in academia and institutions. The chosen methods stem from (but are not limited to) Applied Theatre, which has been my study and work background since 2003 and brought me several times to work with people of so-called social disadvantaged categories: people affected by Down syndrome, neuro-divergent patients, former drug-addicted, inmates, refugees and asylum seekers.

Neuro-divergent performing artists like Oozing Gloop, whose work explores the politics of the body and representation, interact with contemporary society's complex narratives. It is a society that pushes individuals to settle for what they are and have and, in the face of severe adversity, to remain rational. Performers who present some forms of invisible disabilities are thus forced to accept the role of an extreme case in a scenario of joint accounts. This scenario does not risk questioning healthy groups' central position and advantages.

When discussing an extreme case, it is considered to be at the edge of what is permissible in a possible series of events. Perhaps, then, it is no coincidence that artists with disabilities who struggle for survival still encounter accessibility difficulties in the field of performing arts. In the same way, framing a person with a differentiated body as an example of courage and resistance to comfort those who fit the norm is superficial: ableism with white gloves. Conversely, it is essential to emphasize that when artists and performers with visible or invisible disabilities are provided with the ideal conditions to express their full creative potential, they often produce extraordinary and innovative results.

### **ASPERGER SYNDROME**

Asperger syndrome is a form of autism that includes behavioural and relationship disorders, but those affected can lead an everyday life. The syndrome takes its name from the controversial Viennese paediatrician Hans Asperger, who at the beginning of the 20th Century described the behaviour of what he called "little professors" (FRITH, 1991, p. 74). He noted that children with a solitary character, clumsy in their movements, were often isolated from their peers and had difficulty communicating and relating to others. However, he also realized that these particular children were also able to cultivate their interests (music, science, literature, mathematics, collecting) with a specific dedication, to the point of becoming real experts. Aspies also speak little or use excessively freewheeling speech and behave in a repetitive, schematic way (FRITH, 1991).

The causes of Asperger's Syndrome are not yet fully known, and the origin is likely multifactorial. It can be hypothesized that this is because of a genetic predisposition (Oozing Gloop's father had it, in fact), considering the recurrence of cases within some families. It has also been hypothesized that exposure to toxic factors during the first weeks of pregnancy can alter the normal development of the baby's central nervous system and predispose to the syndrome. Still, there are no reliable scientific data today in this regard. Other detectable symptoms are forgetting essential things in their life (such as eating) but having excessive attention to particular objects or interests; for example, storing and collecting data of little value or solving intricate puzzles. Often, they struggle catching the gaze of other people who speak to them. It is hard for them to express their feelings (a trait clinically known as social-emotional agnosia or emotional blindness), for they

find it difficult to perceive and recognize the facial expressions, body language or vocal modulation of other persons. In so doing, they enclose themselves to protect themselves from external reality (SZATMARI, 2004).

Oozing Gloop are fully aware of their cognitive diversity, presenting features with a particular accentuation concerning, at times, unstoppable freewheeling speech and verbal speed. Since they started to perform, they have realized their problems in relationships with colleagues, cultural operators, and audiences. If not adequately supported, they can develop depression or anxiety disorders.

## **INTENTION**

When I operate as a tutor, I aim to improve behaviour and communication skills, especially when called to train young artists, performers, and students affected by some forms of cognitive disabilities. Improving those skills helps support them in relational aspects that could otherwise isolate them from others when working in a group. I encourage their strengths and invite them to speak of and share their special interests as they are a resource of fun, inspiration, learning and self-esteem.

Kevin Burrows has extensively written that conceived multi-modal expressive arts processes (precisely to entwine the subject's life experience with their unique interests and enforce their creative drive) benefit autistic artists to gain self-worth and belief. When working in a group, undertaking "a multi-modal expressive arts process challenges the notions of exclusion through disability. It creates a social cosmology of self in, and as part of, community, and a sense of belonging and self-worth" (BURROWS, 2017, p. 7).

The question is different when drawing a tutorship for a single artist diagnosed with Asperger syndrome or autism. Aspies struggle in relating with other people and are very selective with those with whom they choose to interact. Therefore, what the tutor must create is, above all, a climate of total mutual trust to feel them comfortable to share their problems and deepest concerns, that it is to hold for them a safe space to be open, loyal and honest (FOXX and MULICK, 2005).

I have known Oozing Gloop since 2014. They took part in five of our intensive workshops and consider my partner, German artist Verena Stenke and I among their most reliable and trustworthy tutors and mentors. When they received the DYCP grant from the Art Council of England to implement their artistic practice, they called us to mentor for the following artistic urgencies and a personal concern: a) develop their performative language beyond the drag-queen style they felt to be successful but still too much trapped in it; b) explore a minimal approach to performance; c) strengthen conceptual consistency in their speech (Oozing Gloop possesses the hyper-ability to talk for hours without interruption, but they very often lose the thread of the content of their speech, seemingly speaking nonsense even when they do not want to); d) improve a performative relation with simple, everyday objects; e) implement a vocabulary of genuine movements

(not representational or mimic) with and without objects; f) experiment to perform non-verbally and convey meaning; g) deepen and transfer their personal concerns into their performances (notwithstanding their sky-rocketing artistic career, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic caused them to stay in forced isolation for more than one year. The concomitant death of their father that they had not processed yet led Oozing Gloop to be even more distant from people. Their well-being was at stake for having plummeted into depression and substance abuse. I too had undergone similar experiences at their age.

## **PREPARATION**

I organized the mentorship at C32 performingartworkspace (Venice, Italy) from October 10 to 29, 2021. It is where Verena Stenke and I, working as VestAndPage, have held the ongoing Educational Learning Program of the Venice International Performance Art Week since its inception in 2012. Before meeting in Venice and beginning the mentorship, Oozing Gloop and I undertook correspondence via email and online conversations at specific deadlines from March to September 2021. Being a professional Rebirthing practitioner, experienced in helping drug addicts, and a certified operator of Applied Theatre for differently-abled performers, in these virtual meetings, I invited Oozing Gloop to reflect upon a series of must-have skills (technical, human, and conceptual), aiming to get back their self-confidence. I asked them to read books (once a week) on their topics of interest and keep a daily journal comprising a critical report of the accomplished readings.

During our online conversation, I explained what they could expect during the mentorship. We talked about how to challenge their thinking about the reality outside with the pandemic still spreading. This online preparatory stage aimed mainly to prepare them to exit the situation they felt ensnared in, risking transforming into an anaemic comfort zone of absolute immobility.

The start of a task is fascinating for everyone, but what is more exciting is to accomplish it. What I expected from the time we will spend together, intended as a project and not only mentorship, was to conceive and complete a new performance for their repertoire, to implement their awareness about when they learn best.

Learning is challenging in nature. To not put pressure on Oozing Gloop, I told them we would experiment together, working horizontally and from scratch to make the process of learning more accessible and manageable. I asked them to set an ideal working schedule in advance, taking into account 8-12 hours per day for three weeks: carve out time and tasks and allocate them properly during each day, morning to evening. I also questioned how they might imagine learning better, taking into account their disappointing experience when studying at the university. I had to figure out the best ways to keep them motivated, maintain a high concentration level, absorb information and discuss them, and, eventually, self-assess themselves on the progress made. I told them that whatever they will learn and feel to apply immediately, they should try to do that in the con-

text of the project, writing, performing at night, at home, and presenting the outcome for analysis and further discussion. I reminded them that finishing our project would take discipline, diligence, stamina, endurance and patience from both of us. We had to review the material produced every day, inspect, dig and dive into it to find ways to use what we experienced the day before as material for the day after, either directly or indirectly.

Considering Oozing Gloop's performance skills already acquired, their freewheeling speech talent, ability to play with spoken words, but difficulties in creating a vocabulary of movements to use and enact on stage, I designed the mentorship as a learning path sourcing from the philosophical framework of the "porous body" by Canadian scholar and choreographer Louis Laberge-Côté. He speaks of the porous body in these terms: it is "a structure of feeling that focuses on the practice of an approach to movement, as opposed to the practice of movement itself. Since it is not attached to a specific movement vocabulary, aesthetic or series of exercises, this framework can be incorporated into diverse forms of performance training." (LABERGE-CÔTÉ, 2018, p. 68).

Moreover, I asked Oozing Gloop to consider the mentorship process as an opportunity for co-creation to navigate further the politics of the body and re/presentation. These two aspects already inform their performative works determinedly. The challenge was their reductive desire to conclude something at any cost too soon, ending up to repeat themselves.

During summer, I invited them to write a series of considerations trying and reflecting on disrupting scripted hegemonies through subversively introduced tremors, employing humour, shame, the absurd, raw anger, slapstick, hardship, friendship and a constant stream of slippages. To put it short, I let them free to surf in their frenzied linguistic universe but write down shards and relics they found in it, whatever they may be. What I had in mind was that the outcome of the mentorship should have been a performance piece made up of both found and haphazardly produced elements, not to suffocate Oozing Gloop's already developed performative style but to strip it of the unnecessary. Their wish was to learn how to deliver meanings to the audience, not just to entertain them, risking ending up lost in a sea of witty nonsenses but hard to grasp. I envisioned a performance project that should define itself in its process, in the making, and against the dogmatic requirement of an original idea or a universal significance at any cost.

Knowing Oozing Gloop's cognitive strain (that occurs when the brain is pushed to manifold mental calculations for processing excessive information and act multiple tasks) and how they perform, I structured the mentorship process as a processual experience that should stand as a network of abiding incompleteness. It should have developed as a dynamic choir of urgencies and pleasures, traumas and manifestations that communally are embedded between dominant and minor themes, with one performer only on stage (Oozing Gloop) as the mediator/tool of all that and an anchor of safety outside (the mentor).



Not to make Oozing Gloop's freewheeling speech and verbal speed disintegrate in infinite reasoning with the danger of falling into linguistic randomness and disorder, but to give them a precise trajectory, I opted to make them focus first and foremost on themselves. Central to the project should be their life story, autobiography and autoethnography, their vision of the world and how this changed with the labour of maturing and accomplished life experiences.

Using life experiences in a creative procedure often allows performative immediacy and genuine expressive authorship. Given an inclusive learning environment built on the mentor's and alumnus's mutual trust and empathy, fears and inhibitions to exit one's comfort zone slowly fall, and emotional blocks are eradicated. A creative space opens for encouraging connections with the alumnus's previous life experiences that, during the working process, transform into subjects of learning or, better, a *materia prima* to make art (SVENDBY, 2020).

Eventually, also I invited them to ponder and write on the notion of "ritual" as a specific device to perform, exploring the meaning of liminal rituals known as "rites of passage" studied by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep and later on by Victor Turner, which occurred in three stages: "Separation (from ordinary social life); margin or limen (meaning threshold), when the subjects of ritual fall into a limbo between their past and present modes of daily existence; and re-aggregation, when they are ritually returned to secular or mundane life either at a higher status level or in an altered state of consciousness or social being." (TURNER, 1979, p. 466-467).

In so doing, Oozing Gloop should have pinned down some moments they had experienced or events referable to those three stages in their life. Rites of passage are particular, but those three stages apply to different life moments and experiences. I intended to get them to write something heartfelt to them, honest and with clarity, eventually to serve as a first script draft for the mentorship co-creative process, thus to be used as material for the possible performance project.

For the benefit of performers with Asperger's syndrome, in carrying out creative work, it is essential that from the beginning, the tutor or mentor makes sure that the alumni/ae maintain a high level of concentration, motivation and enthusiasm on the tasks assigned to them. It does not matter if the results are immediately satisfactory or not. It is essential to create a work situation with precise and recognizable references by the alumni/ae so that they feel comfortable navigating creatively in their universe and not suffocated by the pressure of having to complete the assigned task at any cost. Also, the alumni/ae must feel that the mentor or tutor is close to them, not exactly with a professorial attitude but as a friend to trust and rely on. On August 28, 2021 – one month and a half before working together – Oozing Gloop wrote me a very dense email (a few poignant points are herewith):

Recently, someone I was with said: ‘I do not know if I would say I am not a man because I have no idea what that is supposed to be in the first place.’ It is fascinating to me in ‘man’ that a gender-based transition occurs into the other. I do not know precisely what you mean by rites of passage, but I certainly think it could be: ‘And then you will be a man, my boy!’ Very indefinable alchemy is present here, which I would consider the whisper of something genuine and honest. Femininity has already received this existential interrogation by Simone de Beauvoir: ‘One is not born a woman but becomes a woman.’ Masculinity is constructed through many secret rites that cannot be said or seen clearly- but are crucial, which is why it is so fragile! The rite of passage, I feel, is a performative moment or experience that is designed to create this noble spirit, both free and personally responsible. I firmly believe the first 7-8 years of my life were a trial by fire for my mother that completely transformed her from a very free spirit who owned a set of shoes, car and duvet to a firmly set mother of two—a rite of passage into motherhood. In many ways going to university is a rite of passage in the U.K. The content of one’s degree has very little value compared to getting the degree and then having the degree! All my friends from Queen Mary University arrived as children. They left young adults who got jobs in areas utterly unrelated to any of their passions- publishing, advertising or real estate made possible by the magic wand of a diploma but one entirely unnecessary for unrolling. I say this as someone who turned 30 on Friday the 13th of last November and went sober on the 14th. My father died on the 15th, and I felt like Jesus in the cave at Easter on these three days. (OOZING GLOOP, 2021, unpagged)

Somehow, I was hoping for a similar, striking response. Hence, before meeting in Venice, I gave Oozing Gloop a further assignment, a simple autobiographical exercise related to their email. I ask them to write the story of their life year by year, from birth to today, but strictly in a synthetic and schematic way. They should have written one sentence only per year, the event more critical they recall, or, if nothing would have come to their mind, just: “I do not remember” if they did not remember anything at all of that year. Once in Venice, we started to work in the performative space with this material.

## **PRODUCTION**

Every morning, we undertook physical and breathing exercises to implement their focus, mobility on stage and confidence in their body. We worked a lot on their voice inflexion and word pronunciation, approaching the voice as a body, modulating dictation and speech between pauses, speeds, tones and chromatism. We worked with simple objects, decontextualizing their normal function to enforce alertness and readiness. The beginning was not easy, but gradually it allowed Oozing Gloop’s mind to shift from one task to another quickly but awarely and avoid entanglement while combining spoken words with physical actions.

I asked Oozing Gloop to bring with them from home objects dear to them, such as tarot cards, not to read them or say about their meaning while performing, but as connecting elements that would give colours to their speech. Then, I introduced to them other

familiar objects to play with, like a rubber ball, a wooden baton, a rope, a chair, a small square table, a ladder, and a lit candle. I ask them to find a relation trying to remember the first relation they had with them when they used those objects for the first time and, in so doing, find a way to build a vocabulary of movements and non-ordinary relations with those objects regardless of their function. And then the work on the text and the dramaturgy. The memory of each year refers to an experience or an event. However, it always underlies a few concepts that can be developed and dissected to say something else, perhaps philosophically catching—crucial moments such as “coming out” to reclaim one’s identity because identities have never been fixed. Now they are declared altering. We look for words expressing the emotional and psychological effort of coming out, the courage of declaring one’s identity to the world: queer, non-binary, transgender. A person who believes in themselves, although at times feeling refused (or bullied) by people or unaccepted by family and communities. Society relegates diversity to the margin. Thus, it makes people suffer consequent overload and burnout due to their condition of being diverse from the norms.

To shift from personal accounts and turn to collective imagery to possibly involve a heterogeneous audience, we embarked on an ontological quest to define conceptual personae to act as storytellers on the stage. Entrusting Oozing Gloop’s skills and experience in playing an irreverent, extrovert drag queen for years, I accompanied them to experiment with alternatives to liberate themselves while protecting their identity. However, I asked them to abandon their usual drag queen style to embody new abstractions (not characters) but remain themselves, according to their performance autobiographical text. “Concepts need conceptual personae that play their part in their definition.” (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1994, p. 3).

Through conceptual personae, concepts are not only thought but also perceived and felt. They so are identities, which are too often reductively associated just with the mental image one has of oneself. Identities are ever-changing, and they spring from self-concepts and levels of self-esteem. It is arduous to assert one’s individuality to the world outside courageously.

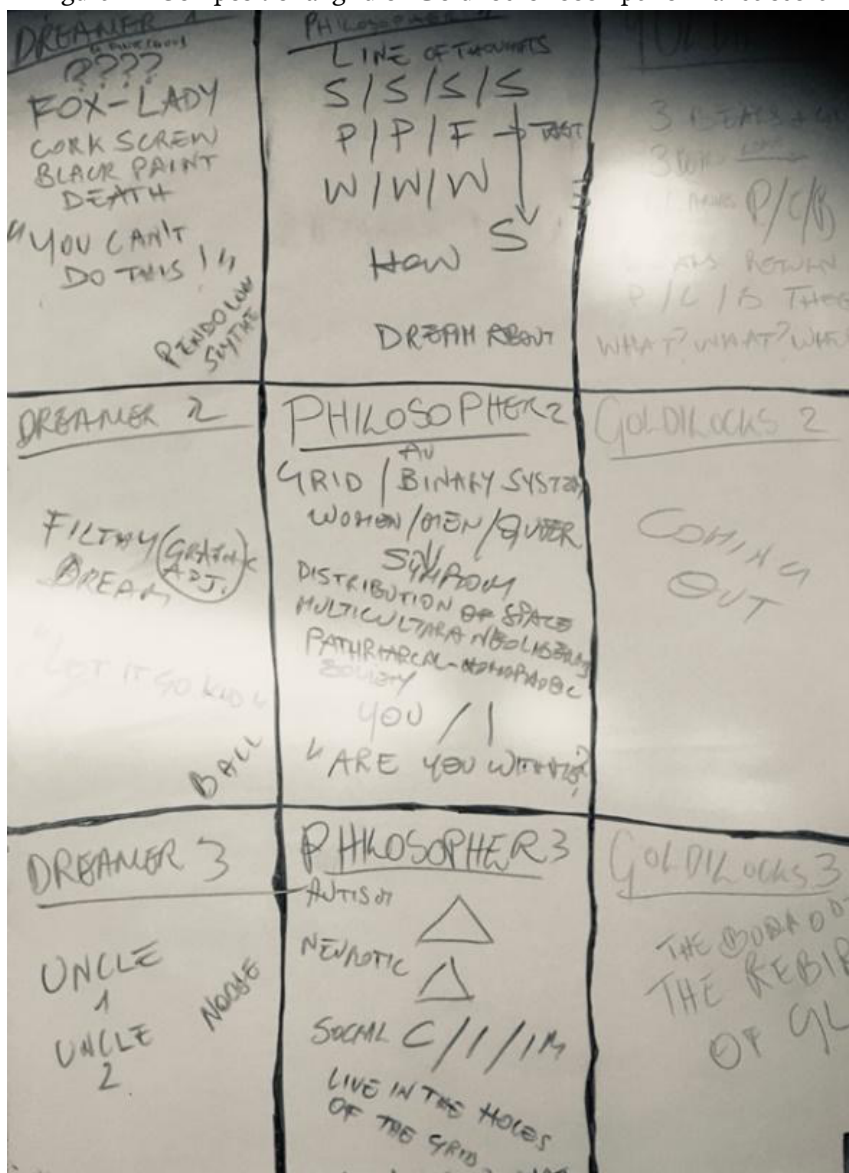
Therefore, I asked Oozing Gloop to reflect on the things that intellectually and emotionally stimulated them the most in those moments when they were alone. Their answers were: dreams, social critique articles and essays, fairy tale readings, tarot cards and numerology. The next step was to rework the text and split it into sections, allowing a precise order of dictation and an equally alternating rhythm. I suggested disassembling and reassembling the text not by dwelling on the meaning of individual words or phrases but as if these were the components of a riddle to be solved or the colourful tiles of a Rubik cube to line them up on instinct, as some Aspies can do swiftly. I proposed to them that the text should transform into a kaleidoscopic, non-linear chronicle of some

of their most significant lived momentums. They should have looked for seriousness in playfulness and truths that complicate conservative beliefs, poured by the mouth of a performer-holy fool which one cannot help but listen.

To reach clarity and synthesis of speech, we drafted a series of schematic, compositional geometrical grids for the performance to have a fixed duration (ca. 1 hour and 15 minutes). Oozing Gloop could insert salient recounts of their life story and improvised interjections inside these grids. This way, they could span freely on impulse according to their very nature, but without losing the thread of the essential things to say while performing. Especially for performers suffering from Asperger's syndrome, in constructing a performance score, the compositional grids allow greater immediacy than a classic script in absorbing elements, components and moments that constitute the performance. The schematic visualization of the score through the grid makes it easier for the performer to remember their tasks: what the performer must do at certain moments of the performance, what content and textual themes they must tell, what actions they must perform and how. It is a method that helps activate one's memory faster, accurately and dynamically. I am not saying that this method works for every performer belonging to the Autistic spectrum. However, it certainly worked in this specific case considering Oozing Gloop's "cognitive correlates of autism spectrum disorder symptoms" (JOHNSON et al., 2021), verbal and non-verbal intelligence, and the length of time for which they can concentrate mentally on a particular activity. For instance, to use the compositional grids effectively, I let Oozing Gloop draw their own and then confront them with mine, not to give evidence of differences, gaps and faults among the two grids, but to overlay them and make a third one, this way prolonging their attention span on the performance score construction.

These compositional grids were also helpful in identifying which conceptual persona could work best in recounting Oozing Gloop's significant autobiographical moments and how to tell them on stage: the dreamer speaking of a reality that becomes a dream; the hectic philosopher dissecting the absurdity of contemporary society while complicating normalcy with lucid madness; the fairy-teller transforming row intimacy and hesitation into moments of pure poetry. Three conceptual personae are activated by one performer or a performer who plays three. The two images herewith display a drafted compositional grid of the performance score (Figure 2) and Oozing Gloop rehearsing the performance on October 2021 (Figure 3):

Figure 2 – Compositional grid of Goldilocks 23332 performance score

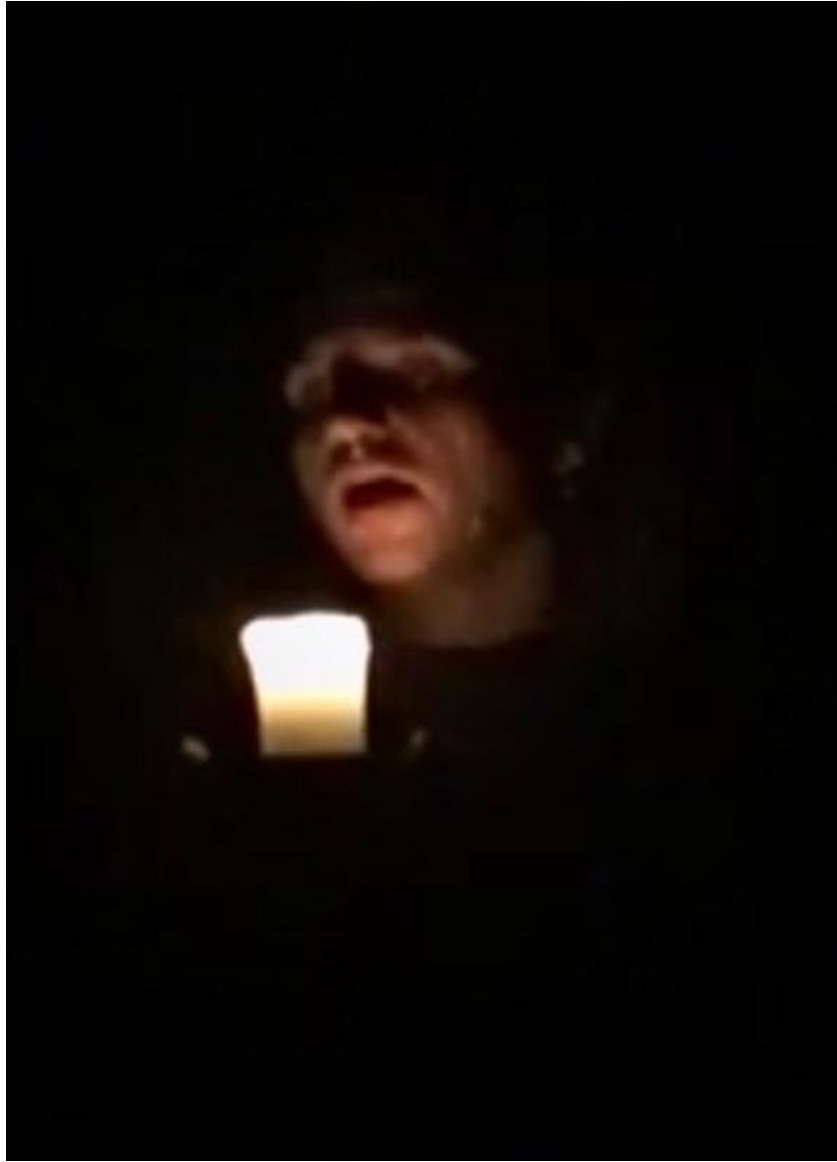


Goldilocks 23332. Performance score. 2021. Photograph: Andrea Pagnes. Courtesy the artist.

**#Descrevipravocê**

Fotografia de um quadro escolar, em formato vertical, dividido em várias repartições com escritas e informações em cada uma das repartições. (Fim da descrição).

Figure 3 – Oozing Gloop rehearsing Goldilocks 23332



The Dreamer. Oozing Gloop rehearsing Goldilocks 23332. 2021. Still from the video.  
Video maker: Aldo Aliprandi. Courtesy the artist.

#### *#Descrevipravocê*

*Fotografia preta, em formato vertical, destacando o rosto de um artista, que está com a boca aberta e uma expressão no rosto, sendo destacada através de uma iluminação que está segurando. (Fim da descrição).*

On the last days of the mentorship, we present the performance rehearsals to four performing artists and tutors from the Venice International Performance Art Week Educational Learning program (Verena Stenke, Marcel Sparmann, Marianna Andrigo and Aldo Aliprandi). They paid a visit and joined us as outer eyes and offered their constructive feedback. All of them already knew Oozing Gloop, their performative style and cognitive difficulties due to Asperger's Syndrome. They all were impressed by their progress and focused work. The comments we received from them encouraged the two of us to

continue refining the performance that emerged during the mentorship process, which we have planned to premiere publicly in 2023/24.

## **POST-REFLECTION**

Indeed, an immersive path of this type, carried out to benefit a young performer suffering from Asperger syndrome, is undoubtedly complex and demanding to obtain concrete and satisfying results. Eventually, I provided them with compositional tools which they did not consider before and enriched their performance vocabulary and repertoire. It helped a lot that we had a performative space entirely at our disposal for three weeks, facilitating our one-to-one immersive co-creative working relationship. It also helped that setting a learning path of this kind outside of academic settings reduced the pressure to work within scheduled limited hours. Time here is the primary currency that performing artists and performing arts students have. Having sufficient time at their disposal to create new works helps reduce the anxiety of reaching a prefixed goal (for the students, getting a good grade). One can focus solely on the quality of their work and learning, diving with higher concentration and responding to the tasks assigned without the pressure of succeeding.

In our collaborative experience, Oozing Gloop felt stimulated every day to establish criteria and standards for themselves to fulfil. However, in Higher Education settings, the question that lingers is: how to deal with students' critical disability (or diverse-ability), neurodiversity and mental health so that there is no risk of excluding them or making them "invisible"?

I believe that institutions, teachers and tutors need to implement a transactional perspective and a relational approach to non-normativity, disability, and neurodiversity, relating to exchange, communication, and the interaction between people. There is a lack of institutional guidelines in many universities and academies, and above all, formal training in inclusive practice and access to pedagogical resources. It is not just a question of breaking down architectural barriers but of implementing knowledge, competence and empathy.

Of course, there is an awareness of diversity. Still, as a problem, it requires continually new insights, connections and interactions between tutors and non-normative students with disabilities to bring about transformative changes within the institutional mechanisms.

Tutor-student relationship creatively explores transmission and assessment methods with inclusive effects. It underlies practising the politics of care, continuous attention to the student as an individual, creating inclusive and proactive group dynamics that overcome the shallows of competitive attitudes between students and establishing assessment criteria and flexible quality standards that must be considered case by case.

Higher Education institutions should take responsibility for accessibility by providing academic staff with clear guidelines and mandatory training in inclusive practice. It might help ensure a fair and consistent educational program and create databases of pedagogical resources that they can draw on to improve these relations. Especially when it comes to performing arts subjects and practices taught within the academy, they should never be taught routinely. As tutors and experienced performers, we should never forget that we accompany students on a fascinating journey full of pitfalls that test their sensitivity. Therefore, as we accompany them, we should hold the space for them and offer them the right tools to return enriched and empowered from the journey. The same also applies to diversely-abled students, and perhaps even more so.

In institutions, inclusion is often treated as a formality, and instead, what is needed is a joint effort between institutions and academic staff to outline tailored teaching, learning and assessment for every circumstance. To this matter, we cannot talk about generic or normative modalities but understand that each student with special needs requires facilitators and institutions to shape an individual approach to learning to address their needs.

Every academic institution should therefore ask themselves the following questions: “How do current policy, institution management, teaching, learning and assessing influence the development of an inclusive Higher Education? What are the opportunities and challenges for students with special needs in Higher Education within this specific academic institution?” (ZABELI et al., 2021, p. 5)

In theory, it is fair to admit that the concept of inclusion is widespread in Higher Education institutions. In practice, however, disabled or neurodivergent students often risk remaining excluded from meaningful participation. It is not only according to law and policies that institutions can provide an inclusive learning environment, but the academic staff should engage in inclusive practices, as institutions also depend on it. However, adequate training and pedagogical resources are scarce. Awareness of diversity and its approach increases and develops through experiences and interactions, modifying learning situations, and experimenting with inclusive pedagogical strategies. Among the solutions to the problem is that each institution offers formative pedagogical skills courses related to knowledge of diversity, inclusion or adaptation to their academic staff. Completely ignoring these topics can be understood as part of an exclusion process, considering that Higher Education institutions cater to a large student population and are required to provide equal training and opportunities to students regardless of any predisposition or disability. Making every tutor understand that alone can represent a surplus if tutors undertake a similar training path for themselves, and a risk and a limit if they do not.



Studies show how necessary it is for Higher Education institutions to make changes to benefit students with disabilities or with mental issues. It would be beneficial that academics and universities engage in ongoing dialogue and exchange on the issue of disability to draw up and make clear public guidelines so that academic staff can become familiar with their responsibilities towards students with disabilities. Nevertheless, the responsibility of academic staff to take an inclusive approach in their teaching needs to be clarified: how should they respond when students reveal challenges, when difficult situations arise in teaching, and when they realize that a student may be eligible for support?

Clarity is essential to ensure that the faculty deliver a fair and consistent educational program that students understand. As tutors, when we connect with other peers and exchange ideas and experiences, we are led to reflect critically on our pedagogical practices.

We mature, suggest and receive new insights. We may imagine together new realities concerning the theme of inclusion and diversity, creatively developing strategies in response, and human connections have the transformative potential to make a difference in practice<sup>1</sup>.

## ANNEX

### A VERY SIMPLE PIECE: GOLDBLOCKS 23332

Draft script and performance score

*Spoken text:* Oozing Gloop.

*Editing and score:* Andrea Pagnes.

*Performance:* one performer performing one single act. The act is structured in three movements of three momentum each and performed without interruption.

*Personae:* the performer embodies three personae: a philosopher, a dreamer, a fairy-teller. When the stage is dark, the sounds are produced by the performer's actions.

The numbers in parentheses along the score and the text are relative to the minute count.

The title of the performance is inspired by Robert Southey's fairy tale "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" (1837).

## MOVEMENT 1

*Curtain opens. Stage: DARK. Sounds: rope skipping, heavy breath, murmuring (2:35)*

*Momentum 1: The philosopher sits at a table at the centre of the stage | One spotlight*

*Spoken text:* "A simple, clear, linear line of thought. It is what I would like to share with you this evening. Structure-symptom-stigma-system. These are two 2's. Two partners we access throu-

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<sup>1</sup> This mentorship is part of a broader research I am currently pursuing: "Islands Included: inclusive productions methodologies for diversely-abled performing arts practitioners", supported by the funding program #TakeHeart-Fonds Darstellende Künste by the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media.

gh 3 3's. 3 mutually interdependent, meaningful, yet arbitrary points or coordinates. Example. Past (what's your name?) / Present (what do you do?)/ Future (where are you from?). To arrive at... The symptom. How are you? That which does not work. The stigma we use to diagnose a response within a structure or system. How are you? Rarely answered honestly, thought rude perhaps if so even, it reveals in a lack of functionality; the function of a system that does not allow us to arrive at points of genuine empathy with one another. Oh, were I to be in charge, were I to rule the world, I would abolish this question and replace it with another: "What did you dream about, last night?" (10:25)

*Stage: DARK. Sounds: a baton swings in the air and a clock ticks (12:05)*

**Momentum 2:** *The dreamer sits on a chair on the left side of the stage almost turning their back to the audience | One spotlight*

*Spoken text:* "A fox girl is yelling: YOU CAN'T DO THIS! Because in my hand is the whole world. Shaped as a corkscrew. Covered in rainbow paint. Also in my palm is black paint from the grim reaper. It kills colour on the corkscrew, the world, where it makes contact. We smear more paint on it. Fungus and dinosaurs emerge. It doesn't work. Death's head is grinning at me through the hole in the corkscrew. Humming a single tone." (17:10)

*Stage: DARK. Sounds: a baton smashes and rolls on the stage floor. A scream: "You can't do this!" (19:00)*

**Momentum 3:** *The fairy-teller walks across the stage holding a candle illuminating their face*

*Spoken text:* "Goldilocks is the story of three bears and a girl called Goldilocks. The bears make porridge for breakfast, but it's too hot, so they go on a walk. Goldilocks enters. She tries their porridge, chairs and beds, falling asleep in the last one. The three bears return, and in turn, each exclaim: "Someone has eaten my porridge, sat in my chair and slept in my bed!" Only baby bear cries out: "And they are still there!" ... WHAT!? WHAT!? WHERE!?" (22:05)

*Stage: DARK. Sound: drums crescendo. Action: restless sleep in a bed | Soft light (26:45)*

## MOVEMENT 2

*Stage: DARK. Sounds: silence (27:05)*

**Momentum 4:** *The philosopher sits at a table at the centre of the stage, then they stands on it | One spotlight*

*Spoken text:* "2 2's form two crosses that overlap and make a grid. Grids come from and reinforce binaries. Symptomatic of grids is a 3+1 distribution. 3 nails pinned Jesus to a 4-way wooden cross. He/she/they, 3 pronouns that cover 4 gendered expressions, male, female, trans and non-binary. Many other pronouns used by the LGBTQIA+ community have failed to penetrate. Of course, this is usually the LGBT community, but LGB or LGT issues are generally the focus, not all 4. Man shall not lie with a man as a man lies with a woman. Woman as a symptom of man?! A-symmetrical. Binaries, e.g. straight/gay, provide explicit space, mixed spaces, de facto straight and queer spaces: fleeting, quickly and easily evicted moments. Are you with me? You should be. "You" is spelt with 3 letters, I with 1 letter, I am certain, you uncertain, only you should be

certain, as you are an I and I am a you to you! So you are an I, but I'm an I too, so an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind! Ahhhhhh!" (37:30)

*Stage: DARK. Sounds: steps walking on the floor of the stage (38:00)*

**Momentum 5:** *The dreamer sits on a chair on the left side of the stage to almost turning his back to the audience | One spotlight*

*Spoken text:* "I had a filthy dream last night. A man takes me to use me. Like a pig, to harvest my turd. He forces me into a strange arabesque in a concrete compound. And fucks me. Until my insides fly out. Into a bucket especially there to catch them, which he takes out back to his hole of excrement, slowly filling it. I will bathe here, eventually it will be a cocoon, a place I will crystallise submerged in shit. The shit of 1000 faggots!" (42:00)

*Stage: DARK. Actions: ball juggling, falling and then rolling across the stage; apple eating. A scream in the dark: "Let it go, kid!" (44:00)*

**Momentum 6:** *The fairy-teller walks on the front edge of the stage holding a candle illuminating their face*

*Spoken text:* "Goldilocks was different to who she was and the people around her. She rehearsed her rejection from everyone and declared herself. Goldilocks was gay. The world twisted and changed. The potential of a beautiful life revealed itself. Reform, reorganisation and revolution. All became possible with nothing more complex than the truth." (48:30)

### MOVEMENT 3

*Stage: DARK. Sounds: insistent knocking at a door. A scream: "Hey, let me in!" (50:25)*

**Momentum 7:** *The philosopher sits at a table at the centre of the stage, playing with tarot cards and a glass of water | One spotlight*

*Spoken text:* "Autistic people are treated as esoteric and puzzling objects to be decoded. Puzzling Arcanum. Aspergers and autism are defined through a triad of impairments. However, as I have evidenced, neurotypical society is impaired by triads. We have a lack of social communication with small talk that says nothing. We lack social interaction with de facto heteropatriarchal control, and we lack social imagination as it's easier to imagine the world's funeral instead of the end of capitalism. So we cannot communicate hope to provide us with interactions that help us imagine a plausible reality beyond this. So our communication can only correct the existing. And so, our interactions are policing, and our imagination is a continuation of the carceral colonial capital. If we do not radically and rapidly depart from as a culture, our planet will kill us, and the human species will die." (58:30)

The performer pours the water on the floor from the glass. The stage becomes dark. The performer asks to the audience: "Do you know what I mean?" (58:50)

*Stage: DARK. Sounds: silence (59:30)*

**Momentum 8:** *The dreamer sits on a chair on the left side of the stage and almost turning his back to the audience | They are gently swinging a rope with a noose | One spotlight*

*Spoken text:* “2 of the strangest dreams I ever had to relate to my uncle. He killed himself. I dreamt of hell. It’s red skies, black soil and leafless woods of suicide where harpies torture souls confined there. Am I catholic suddenly? Why have I dreamt of here? White light splits the sky. A magnificent heavenly harpy descends, banishing the other harpies to protect my uncle. I did not dream of him again until years later, after a vicious argument with my lover. My uncle appears and comforts me in a luxurious orange version of the job centre. With a fax machine, he finds me a flat and finance and sees me. I woke up and texted my mother; her brother appeared to me in a dream. She tells me she just learnt something, he was murdered.

2 dreams relating to 2 translations of the same event, one after and one before. What does it mean?” (70:08)

*Stage: DARK. Sounds: chair and rope fall down on the floor (70:40)*

**Momentum 9:** *The fairy-teller is on top of a ladder set in the background of the stage | One candle light illuminate their face*

*Spoken text:* “Goldilocks was burnt out. Nothing was ever going to be just right. The promise of milk and honey; cum. Shit. “Are you ok?” “Can you stand?” “Should we call an ambulance?”

Goldilocks had broken her forearms, and the stigma made her a saint. Until she healed. She then burnt her charcoal to ash. She became dust in the wind. Goldilocks had to die so Goldilocks might live. She mourned; hatred, guilt, pity, despair, grief, love, compassion, illumination, forgiveness. There in the ashes stirred a tiny baby bird. A little phoenix of Goldilocks. Who rose again, pure of body and mind, ready to roam once more.” (76:15)

*The performer blows off the candle. Stage: DARK. Sound: silence (76:20). One minute of silence in the dark and then full LIGHT (77:20). Empty stage. End of the performance.*

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**A VERY SIMPLE PIECE: GOLDBLOCKS 23332**  
**A ONE-TO-ONE MENTORING EXPERIMENT ABOUT THE MARGINS AND**  
**LIMITS OF INDIVIDUALIZED METHODOLOGY FOR A UNIQUE NEED**  
**ARTIST PRESENTING AN INVISIBLE DISABILITY**

**ABSTRACT**

This experience report recounts a one-to-one mentoring experiment I undertook in October 2021 to benefit the performance practice of a former alumni of mine: non-binary British performance artist and drag queen Oozing Gloop (pronouns: they/them), diagnosed on the autistic spectrum. In the fields of performing arts, responses and support to the emergency for mental health and neurodiversity, particularly autism and Asperger's syndrome (so-called invisible disabilities), are still insufficient. However, when the proper support is given to neuro-divergent performers, they are often capable of expressing unparalleled creative potential. The report comprises an annex with a draft script and score of the performance resulted from the mentorship process.

**Keywords:** Performing arts, Applied Theatre, Invisible disabilities, Asperger Syndrome, Autism.

**UNA PIEZA MUY SENCILLA: GOLDBLOCKS 23332**  
**UN EXPERIMENTO DE TUTORÍA SOBRE LOS MÁRGENES Y LÍMITES**  
**DE UNA METODOLOGÍA INDIVIDUALIZADA PARA UN ARTISTA CON**  
**NECESIDADES ÚNICAS QUE PRESENTA UNA DISCAPACIDAD INVISIBLE**

**RESUMEN**

Este informe de experiencia relata un experimento de tutoría individual que realicé en octubre de 2021 con el objetivo de enriquecer la práctica escénica de un ex alumno mío: el artista escénico británico no binario y drag queen Oozing Gloop (pronombres: ellos/ellas), diagnosticado con el trastorno del espectro autista. En el ámbito de las artes escénicas, las respuestas y el apoyo a la emergencia de la salud mental y la neurodiversidad, en particular el autismo y el síndrome de Asperger (las llamadas discapacidades invisibles), siguen siendo insuficientes. Sin embargo, cuando se les brinda el apoyo adecuado, artistas neurodivergentes muchas veces son capaces de expresar un potencial creativo sin precedentes. El informe consta de un anexo con el borrador de guión de la performance que resultó del proceso de tutoría.

**Palabras claves:** Artes escénicas, Teatro aplicado, Discapacidades invisibles, Síndrome de Asperger, Autismo.