

issue #2

UN//M A S K I N G
the performing arts
UN//M A S K I N G

un//masking
in practice

I'm out...



un//masking the performing arts issue #2

un//masking in practice

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HOW

To Read This Zine




This zine is all about un//masking - the artistic practice of expressing your neurodivergent* traits. In this zine we share any research, reflections, tools and open questions around neurodivergence, un//masking and disability justice*.

This zine has been created specifically for and by queer and neurodivergent performers, in order to make the in//visible disability more present on stages. These zines are queer collages of experiences, scores, methodologies, artist examples and tons of citations - presented as bubbly, exciting and confusing as my neurodivergent brain. A space for open, unanswered questions, daring and funny tryouts and a space for crip* failure.




In the spirit of crippling / glitching / neuroqueering and un//masking the system together.



Zine setup: This zine is part of a series. All the base knowledge around un//masking is also extensively discussed in zine #1.

Jump around! There is no need to read the zine series or each zine issue from a-z, please give yourself permission to read this zine in whatever way suits you. To make jumping around easier, some theories or thoughts might be partially repeated.

Glossary Attempt: To contextualize how I understand the terms I use in the zines, and how they stand in reference to each other, I made a printable glossary-attempt-mind- map for download.



Un//masking is a practice and a methodology specifically created for neurodivergent performers, supporting them in making more neurodivergent-friendly choices. The whole zine series is based on researching un//masking for performers and what that could look like on and off stage for different individuals.

Toolbox: The zines are set up as a toolbox to collaboratively un//learn different ways of un//masking. The goal is to find ways of integrating them into our stage performances - or discover ways in which we might have already integrated them.

Transdisciplinary: Each zine is a toolbox, with practical examples, which are gathered across the performing arts such as theatre, music, art performances, drag performances, comedy shows or literature readings. Each field has different conditions (e.g. performance length, kind of audience, funding structures, scene standards). Not all the tools proposed might fit to your practice, so just take what speaks to you <3



Who is I? For most of the texts, I is Lovis, a white, neuroqueer, nonbinary performer, drag artist & DJ from Zurich. A few years ago they started their own un//masking practice: Lovis regularly facilitates un//masking workshops and organised the un//masking research LAB with 10 other neuroqueer performers, which is often cited in these zines. Lovis is a late-diagnosed neurodivergent person, working with a neurodiversity-affirming approach which is an extension of the social model of disabilities. Sometimes I are other people, but in that case you will always find their name cited.

Reworking: Feel free to further reuse all the ideas of this zine! If you use sCRIPts, methodologies, text passages or full images, we would love to be referenced

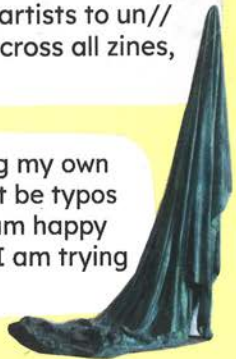


and this is
the un//masking
LAB I keep
banging
on about

Bibliography: All the bibliography and some further resources from the zines #1 - #4 can be found at the very end of zine #1. While most pictures are sourced, the collages contain original pictures gathered from many different magazines and flyers, which are - as it often is the case in collaging - not sourced.

sCRIPts: Are little scores / instructions written by different neurodivergent artists to inspire other neurodivergent artists to un//mask their own work. You will find them scattered across all zines, and zine #4 is fully dedicated to sCRIPts.

Un//masking my writing: In the spirit of un//masking my own writing and challenging my perfectionism, there might be typos or things I misunderstood at the time of writing, While I am happy about feedback, I hope you are as generous with me, as I am trying to be gentle with myself.



Glossary Attempt

A Poster

I really struggled writing a glossary, I felt constricted by the format and nervous to do it wrong. Given that activist language is always in discussion and changes very quickly - as it should - it seems important to explain some terms and contextualise how I understand them.

In order to give my mind-mappy brain an adequate form of expression, please look at the A2 Poster I have created. It will show how the concepts relate to each other.

Words in the glossary attempt:

Ableism
Access
Aesthetics of Access
Bodymind
Crip
Crip Theory
Crip Spacetime
Disability Justice
Internalized Ableism
Intersectionality

Masking
Neurodivergent
Neurodiverse
Neurodiversity Movement
Neurodiversity Paradigm
Neuroqueer
Pathology Paradigm
sCRIPt
Social Model Of Disability
Unmasking
un//masking

What Is Un//masking?

Masking refers to a social practice of “intentionally, or unintentionally, hiding aspects of yourself to avoid harm in neurotypical environments. Long term masking can lead to neurodivergent burnout and mental health issues.¹” While it’s not only neurodivergent people who put on different masks to go through life, masking is a vital tool for neurodivergent people to be able to maintain work, school, friendships and partnerships. I find it important to ask in which moments un//masking can release new resources - energies that are otherwise used for masking. I am interested in un//masking as a counter-movement to conforming to a standardised, ableist society and the associated capitalist pressure to perform - values that are often conveyed through masking.

The Becoming Of Un//masking A Small Summary

Just like Judith Butler, I believe that everything is a performance. As a late-diagnosed person with ADHD I have been masking my entire life - as well as performing cis-womanhood for a long time. After feeling shy to claim the terms neurodivergent and crip for myself at first, I started to identify with disability discourses and crip theory a few years ago around the early 2020’s. The term “unmasking” had just started floating around more visibly in Switzerland (with all the sources still in English).

¹ Miller, Rees & Pearson, “Masking is Life”, Experiences of masking in autistic and nonautistic adults

During my transdisciplinary master studies at the Zurich University of the Arts I started a more practical research about un//masking. I increasingly explored my own un//masking and started bringing a carpet to class to avoid chairs, and was shocked at how much more I could concentrate on the content of the lessons.

I started thinking about un//masking as a practice and how to talk about it, and then slowly to regularly facilitate un//masking workshops.

For my master thesis in transdisciplinarity in the arts at ZHdK I researched in depth about disability justice, neuroqueering, disability as method and un//masking.

Not only in books, research papers and magazines, but also in zines, on instagram and amongst artists using what I considered un//masking practices.

In 2025 I received some funding and support to organise an un//masking LAB at the Theatre Gessnerallee Zürich to invite 8 neuroqueer performers to discuss what un//masking in the performing arts can look like - on stage and in the creation and promotion process, in collective settings, institutional settings and as a solo performer.

My goal was to gather all these ideas and existing practices and - together with my extensive research - create an un//masking zine to share the existing knowledge with other neurodivergent performers. Many of the findings here are based on these exchanges in the LAB and I am excited to see how they are gonna spread further.

Un//masking Workshops

During a writing exercise in a performance course at the Zurich University of the Arts, I started writing a score - a little instruction on how to un//mask. Reading it to the group for them to follow, I was surprised how well the group full of neurodivergent and neurotypical people responded. So I slowly started giving more un//masking workshops specifically for neurodivergent people. And it quickly dawned on me how great the need was for neurodivergent safer spaces.

My workshop is based broadly on Devon Price's book "Unmasking Autism". Because most masking is learned - just look at small children and how unmasked they are - I believe a big part of the un//masking practice is actually reconnecting with yourself and unlearning/questioning your automated masking behaviors. Therefore it's important to me that the workshop has a very embodied approach. So instead of talking much about the theories of masking, we start with exercises pretty soon.

All the things I offer throughout are mere proposals, and a constant exercise for individuals to check in with themselves in order to realize what feels good in that moment, and what to say no to.

To this day I still believe that the magic of the workshop - as well as its major challenge - is creating a safer space where people feel comfortable enough to individually try new things or tap into old, more suppressed behaviors in a room full of strangers without receiving "social punishment". This includes telling the workshop participants that they can leave at any time, and that leaving a workshop early or having a very passive mode of participation is just as much of a "successful" workshop as going big and loud.

“Participants described masking less as a choice or decision, but more as an anxiety-driven response to others’ behaviour and attitudes towards them, or to uncomfortable and inhospitable environments. This fits with some previous findings that masking involves subconscious components, and arguments that masking is a response to not being accepted by the neurotypical world.”

- Rose, Hull et al., “I want to fit in... but I don’t want to change myself fundamentally”

Takeaway Questions From the Un//masking Workshops

By Lovis Heuss

At the end of each workshop, I give the participants some un//masking questions I collected over time. These are not performance-specific, but more about everyday un//masking. But maybe they can help you too. Which movements do I like and how can I incorporate them into my everyday life?

- Do certain sounds that I can make bring me relaxation or pleasure?
- Do I sometimes need fewer sensory impressions, e.g. less seeing / smelling / hearing / feel? Which senses are particularly sensitive? And when?
- Could stimulating touch / fidgeting / stimming give me pleasure or relaxation in everyday life?
- Do I sometimes want to wear different clothes? Which ones?
- Would I like to eat differently? (E.g. different things, more / less repetition, different consistencies, at different times?)
- Would I like to take breaks more often in everyday life? How long and how often? What is a relaxing break?
- What influences my moods and emotions and how can I give them space?
- How do I behave when I'm home alone? What does an unobserved, moment of deep relaxation look like for me?
- Which loved ones do I 'mask' or censor myself with and how?
- With whom do I feel insecure and "not good enough"?

- Who do I force myself to spend time with out of a sense of duty or guilt?
- Who do I find it exhausting to be with?
- Do I want to be alone more often?
- Do I want to talk more or less? Perhaps only about certain topics?
- At what times of day do I find it difficult to be social?
- What conditions do I need in order to be social? Does this change depending on the size of the group?
- How much rest do I need from which kind of social interactions?
- What things / traits / 'tics' / moods am I ashamed of, and why? Do they have anything to do with my neurodivergence?
- What small steps can I take slowly integrate these realisations more into my daily life?
- Can I make more room for my neurodivergence in my daily rhythm and structures?
- Could I break through the social, societal script a little more often in order to do something good for myself?
- How can I be kinder to myself and my access needs, and also stand up for them?
- Can I let people around me know a little more about what is good for me?



Crashing Waves

time to shine

Un//masking LAB

“A gentle, empathetic wandering. Boundaries which feel like pillows to mush into. Where minds wonder. Where I am less anxious. A space I am grateful for. Thank you for trusting us.”

- New Kyd

Being more and more hooked with the un//masking topic as a potential practice, I continued my research more specifically in the area of performance. I started researching what un//masking would look like and quickly realized that there are too many facets for it to just stem from one person and one perspective. So I decided to organise an un//masking LAB.

A LAB is a scientific space for studying something - ours was a space where neuroqueer performers could gather, exchange and study un//masking practices together.



Drawing by LAB Participant Ramona Unterberg, during the un//masking workshop input

LAB Participants

Overall we spent 7 days researching at Gessnerallee Zürich together with:

Kamran Behrouz (they): is a visual artist born and raised in Tehran, currently working and living in Zurich. Their PHD ‘Cosmopolitics of the Body’, uses posthuman critical theory as a navigational tool to examine the boundaries of bodies and humanity’s embedded and embodied cultures.

[@kamran_behrouz](#) / [kamranbehrouz.com](#)

King Kobrrrah (he/him, they/them): is a Drag King from Zurich who loves to challenge gender norms and to create fierce performances from glam to camp.

[@ko_brrrah](#) / [king.kobrrrah@gmail.com](#).

New Kyd (they): is a Zurich-based inter(-disciplinary) movement artist, DJ, and producer whose work traverses dance, sound, and visual media to explore identity, survival, and diasporic existence. With roots in modern dance and Yoruba heritage, their practice is an ongoing inquiry into the body’s capacity to hold memory, strategies of survival through resistance, and transformation.

[newkydddd@gmail.com](#) / [newkyd.allyou.net](#)

Noa Winter (they): is a white, queer, disabled and chronically ill curator and dramaturg, invested in crip futures and the performing arts. They are currently working as a dramaturg at Gessnerallee Zürich and co-created the Relaxed Performance Lab in 2024.

[@queercrippain](#)

Noé Duboutais (he/they): is an artist based in Berlin and Luxembourg. Their practice engages in performance, installation, and writing. Noé performs with his body and voice and makes installations and props. In his practice he is generating and researching fictional and historical material to narrate trans lineages and experiences.

[@noeduboutay](#) / [noe-d.com](#)

Ramón Oliveras (he/they): is a Swiss musician & producer and lead of the groove jazz quintet Ikarus, as well as part of the queer indie rock trio cutecumber (fka Dalai Puma). Ramón co-created the ritual and relaxed performance “A Certain Darkness Is Needed to See the Stars” which is built around his 40’ minimal drum solo. [@ramon_oliveras](https://www.instagram.com/ramon_oliveras) / ramonoliveras.com

Ramona Unterberg (she): is currently working as a Diversity Agent at Gessnerallee Zürich and co-created the Relaxed Performance LAB in 2024.
unterberg.ramona@gmail.com

Tallboy (he/they): is a genderfluid drag king from Canada, now living in Zurich. Their work experiments with soft, queered, feminist, and self-objectified masculinities. He performs both solo and as part of the Heart Throb Mob, a local drag collective.
[@tallboy.is.king](https://www.instagram.com/tallboy.is.king)

Xan Dye (they): is a performance artist exploring the intersection of stimming and dance as a way to access and define a neuro-queer approach to movement practice.
[@xan_dye](https://www.instagram.com/xan_dye)

Zo Hug (they): is a musician and dramaturg from Zurich. With their Duo ENL they make music that is sometimes deafening and sometimes heart-melting and often very funny and sad at the same time.
[@butch.ferrari](https://www.instagram.com/butch.ferrari) / [@enl.es.nervt.langsam](https://www.instagram.com/enl.es.nervt.langsam)

All participants were present and absent to different extents, but all fundamentally changed the basis of this research. As such, these zines are not only based on my personal research, but to a great extent on the collective knowledge of the LAB participants, as well as many other artists and crip researchers I reached out to and spoke with in the process.

Thoughts Behind The Un//masking LAB

The un//masking LAB idea was influenced by two disability-focused labs I attended in the autumn of 2024 - Criptonite's Crip LAB and the Relaxed Performance LAB by Noa Winter, Lea Gockel and Ramona Unterberg - both happening at Gessnerallee Zürich. Having a safer space with other disabled people and time to exchange lived experiences was really magical. But not only that - having time for access needs, trying movement practices in a group of people crippling them to their abilities and needs, and collectively forming thoughts has really impacted me and my practice in the long run. Based on my experiences I wanted to create a similar space with clear structures and lots of flexibility for the participants to un//mask. I thought carefully about breaks, different kinds of workshops that could be offered, as well as what else to slot into the schedule (e.g. check-in rounds, access needs discussions, movement, group work or self study). This meant encouraging the participants to arrive "late", do things differently than planned, or bring up their own interests and ways of working. The themes around un//masking that crystallized the LAB were quite open to emerge collectively. An important aspect for me as a facilitator was to carry out the LAB within crip space-time, which invites crip failure. Hence, the LAB did not have clear goals or a set program to "get things done".

It also meant not having a public sharing at the end of the LAB. Sharings are often expected after such programs, and in my opinion they put a lot of pressure on a LAB to be short-term outcome-oriented, and to use up valuable time planning a show-worthy final product or presentation.

"Thank you once again for the LAB, for making this space. I think it really gave me an opportunity to make sense of the patterns of behavior I have developed. The ones that gave me space to feel responsible for myself without going back to the 'authentic' thing, without performing a version of authenticity that doesn't really align."

- New Kyd

Creating A Safe(r) Space

What we felt during the LAB can in large part can be described as “access intimacy”:

“Access intimacy is also the intimacy I feel with many other disabled and sick people who have an automatic understanding of access needs out of our shared similar lived experience of the many different ways ableism manifests in our lives. Together, we share a kind of access intimacy that is ground-level, with no need for explanations.”

- Mia Mingus, Access Intimacy: The Missing Link

Creating local safe(r) spaces where neuroqueer folks are permitted, accepted, supported, and encouraged is still one of the biggest and most sorely needed activist activities, in my opinion. These spaces might take the form of a workshop, a lab, an exchange or a show which is created as a relaxed performance.



Un//masking Facilitation

When exchanging in the LAB, our thoughts often looped back to un//masking facilitation. Many of us are not only performers, but also facilitate workshops as well, sometimes even on un//masking or stimulating. So the question of whether facilitation can be un//masked is somehow a logical follow-up question.

A participant even said that facilitation, hosting a space, and transmitting knowledge is somehow a performance role as well.

Un//masking LAB Diary - Day 1

“I want to be able to stay with myself while I lead workshops. How can I do that when I’m leading? Which movements do I find ‘acceptable’ and not too distracting? My movements don’t have so much repetition, they are loud and big, I’m afraid of disturbing others. I am always afraid of disturbing others. I am always afraid of disturbing others. I’m always afraid of disturbing others. It’s like this. I’m always afraid of disturbing others.”

- Lovis Heuss

During my un//masking workshops I tried to explore how to lead by example and un//mask during my facilitation, while still holding the room and somehow a safe(r) space. It’s a fine line and I think I over-un//masked, which other participants might feel as pressure to follow my example of what un//masking looks like. I also lose the needed overview and structure if I am too un//masked.

We gathered some tips that helped us have a more un//masked facilitation:

- Make it clear that stimming, lying down, looking away, getting up for snacks and taking breaks are always welcome. Creating room for these elements will help you to un//mask as well.
- Do check-in rounds, which also allows you as a facilitator to share with the room how you are feeling on the day.
- Manage expectations of participants, by creating an introduction which shares your values and takes pressure off of you. Ask people to host themselves with what they need, and let the participants know that creating a safer(r) space is a collective effort.
- Let people know that they can always opt out of or adapt proposed exercises. Let them know they can always leave and that you won't be angry or disappointed. The atmosphere in the room changes immediately if people feel like they have autonomy.
- Give yourself permission to rely on your content - it's okay to show up with less energy or less gathered.
- Take as much time as you need to go through your notes and reorient yourself, even if this means you are not as "present" in the room or people might have to wait a moment.
- Be transparent when you've lost your train of thought or are confused.
- Whenever you need a break, introduce that as a proposal to the group. Most probably others are in need of a break too.
- Make sure to take breaks during the breaks, even if people would like to talk to you. They can stick around after the workshop or send you an e-mail if it's important.

- Be transparent if you don't know things. You could still look it up after the workshop if it still seems important, or you can look it up and discuss it collectively during the workshop.
- Transparently ask for feedback if you feel insecure about the next steps. Un//masking is also about sharing responsibility.
- Try to have a supporting person if possible, who might handle the financial side of things, can go open the door if participants arrive late, or can take over individual care if there is an incident. If you don't have money or structural support for this additional role, you can ask a trusted participant if they could take over a specific task and lower or waive their workshop fee in return.
- Give yourself enough time so you can relax during the workshop: Plan a bit of extra time for a later start (crip time), a spontaneous change in the schedule or some unexpected incidents. And don't forget to also plan enough spoons and time for interactions with people after the workshop.

Crip Time

When I learned about crip time, a lot of things made much more sense to me:

“Crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires re-imagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of ‘how long things take’ are based on very particular minds and bodies”

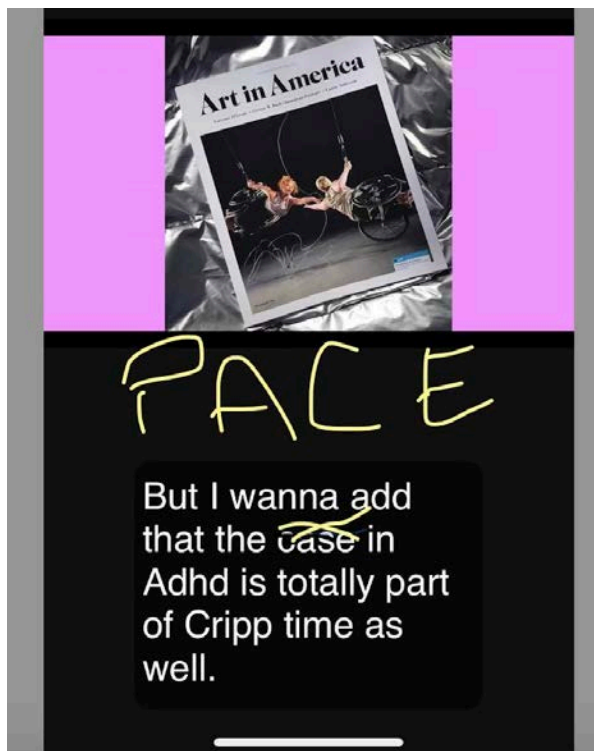
- Alison Kaefer - Feminist, Queer, Crip

In the light of facilitating, crip time is incredibly important to create safe(r) spaces which are accessible to many. It helps us to understand that some participants might need more time to fully arrive in the space, and that some might be “late” (or there whenever the time is right for them).

“If the ‘rational’ temporality of an irreversible past, a punctual present, and a progressive future are inadequate to address contemporary inequalities, then the ‘irrational’ time of lateness might be a way to achieve justice.”

**- B. Rusidhauser
Lateness, Time, Power and Resistance**

Crip time was a good way for me to explain my tendencies to not see time as linear, to be either late or early, to struggle with estimating time and to fall into hyperfocus, losing all perception of time. For the longest time I thought crip time was mainly taking and planning more time for things. It was only after someone pointed out to me that crip time could also mean taking less time, moving faster and doing things quicker that I felt fully seen by crip time.



Care, Disability and Art” - University of Zurich and Zurich University of the Arts ZHdK, Institute of Art History - screenshotted by Sam Musy, because I couldn't partake)

Neuroemergent Time

Slowing down to get things done: the paradox of neuroemergent* time

*aka non-normative neurotypes

“Neuroemergent time can be viewed as an elliptical orbit.

Things speed up during parts of this orbit, but they necessarily slow down during the rest of it.

In neuroemergent time, there are the “getting shit done” phases of the orbit, periods of intense concentration, energy, & productivity. In neuroemergent time, there are also necessarily the “spinning out in space gathering stardust” phases of the spiral orbit, periods of stillness, of staring out windows, of diving down rabbit holes.

You may feel like you only ever experience the “spinning out in space gathering stardust” part of this spiral orbit. In fact, you may call that “Executive Dysfunction.” That is because you have been so shamed about the slow, still parts of your spiral through time, that your “getting shit done” phase of the orbit has been artificially disabled.

That shame is a political tool that has been used to wrench you back into conformity with neuronormative expectations about time and productivity. When you have not been able to conform, on account of your neurodivergent differences, the dysfunction that shame causes is then turned back on you and treated as a symptom of your “pathology.”

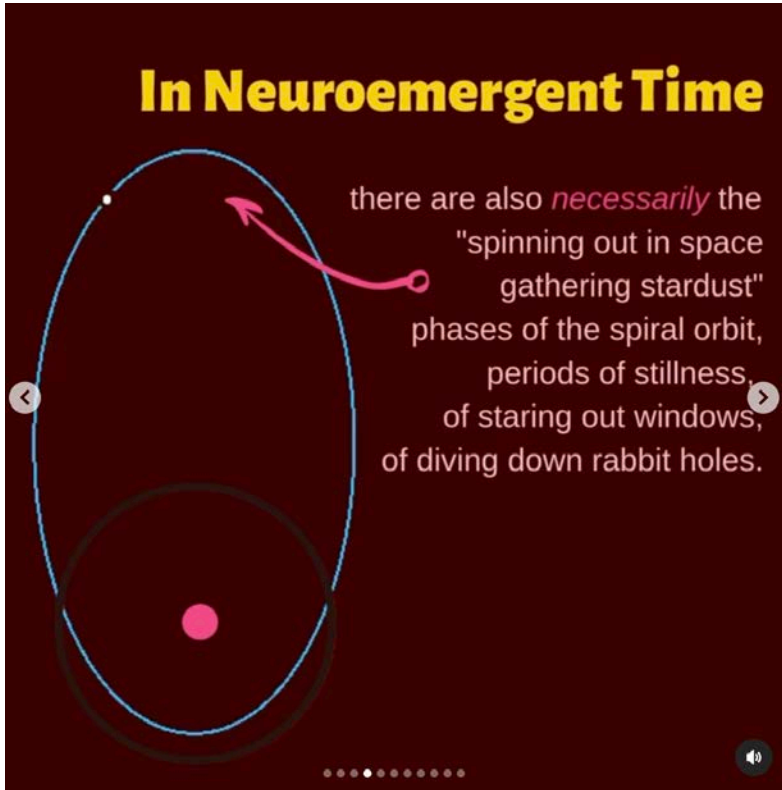
You may feel a lot of grief about “lost time,” “wasted time,” “missed opportunities,” and a lot of shame about former special interests and abandoned projects. But when we start to understand time differently, and we begin to resist the shame that is imposed on us, we can spiral back around and revisit the past, where nothing is ever lost, wasted, or abandoned.

We can begin to compost all that shame and grow gardens in it from the seeds sprinkled out there in space like stardust. We can find threads that we can pull through our whole lives in ways that give them shape and meaning and coherence. We can heal our broken hearts”.

- @divergent_design_studios

Looking through the lense of neuroemergent time, I can better embrace the cyclical ways I work, the way my life is moving in waves and the downtime I need after performances. But embracing neuroemergent time clashes hard with the neurotypical system - one which expects every day, week and month to look the same. It expects work and school to be steady and consistency to be the key. Neuroemergent time can be futher challenged by externally fixed structures like 9-5 jobs, having kids or any other structures.

I felt even more seen when I recently saw an instagram post about neuroemergent time by Marta Rose (@divergent_design_studios²):



² Posted on instagram (@divergent_design_studios, 05.05.2025).

This is why I create best when I am in residencies without fixed daily structures and am able to attune to my neuroemergence. Where I can work at night and sleep in the daytime, or wake up at 7am and go to bed at 9pm. Where I can work a few days in a row, and then take a few days off. I sometimes wonder how workshops and LABs can be created in neuroemergent time. How can we provide a structure and create a group feeling, without “cutting” people’s neuroemergent time? How can different neuro-emergent rhythms align? And is that even possible in a group?

Aesthetics of Access & a Relaxed Setting

For facilitating we can think of Aesthetics of Access as well: How can we implement the thought of accessibility into creating a LAB from the start, rather than making it an afterthought.

One great example are Tanja Erhat’s workshops, which were mentioned in the un//masking LAB:

Tanja Erhart is an Austrian disabled and chronically ill dance artist, cultural anthropologist and intersectional pleasure activist for disability justice based in London. I was able to visit one of Tanjas workshops during the *crip lab*³. During her workshops, she creates spaces in collaboration with the participants. Starting off by gathering the various access needs in the room first, she moves on to design a room with different modes of engagement.

One thing that stuck, is that she places rest in the center, rather than on the margins. So next to the dancing spaces, she also proposes rest spaces in the middle of the room. Some may include dancing while lying, some may include interacting with other participants. Other spaces are in corners and function more as solo rest spaces away from the crowds. It was a beautiful and empowering experience to collectively take time to curate a space together.

³ Organised by Criptonite at Gessnerallee Zürich and Tanzhaus Zürich in 2024..

Un//masking: A Somatic Practice

Working Against the Embodied Knowledge

Masking undermines our instincts to self-soothe as we teach ourselves to ignore our body's signals and conform to neurotypical body standards. As a result, this often leads to a disconnected or dissociated relationship with our bodies.

“Though masking is incredibly taxing and causes us a lot of existential turmoil, it’s rewarded and facilitated by neurotypical people. Masking makes Autistic people easier to ‘deal’ with. It renders us compliant and quiet.”

- Devon Price, Unmasking Autism

When we mask, we become hypervigilant, constantly attuned to the expectations of others and how they want us to be. This can lead to a diffuse sense of self as our social identity becomes dependent on the people around us. It is difficult to develop deep relationships when we mask.

“We’re all expected to play along with the rules of our home culture, and blend into it seamlessly. Those of us who need alternate tools for self-expression and self-understanding are denied them. Our first experience of ourselves as a person in the world, therefore, is one of being othered and confused. We only get the opportunity to take our masks off when we realize other ways of being exist.”

- Devon Price, Unmasking Autism

A Somatic Approach

What is Somatics?

The term “Somatics” was coined by professor and theorist Thomas Hanna in 1976, with the word soma meaning “the body as perceived from within”. Somatics is nowadays a field of movement studies and bodywork that foregrounds the internal physical sensations, perceptions, and experiences of the body. It uses the mind-body connection to help you listen to signals from your body on pain, discomfort, or imbalance.

A somatic movement is a movement that’s practiced consciously with the intention of focusing on the internal experience of the movement rather than the external appearance or the end result of the movement.

“Somatics pragmatically supports our values and actions becoming aligned and helps us to develop depth and the capacity to feel ourselves, each other and life around us. Embodied transformation is foundational change that shows in our actions, ways of being, relating, and perceiving. It’s a practice-able theory of change that can move us toward individual, community and collective liberation.”

- Adrienne Maree Brown, Pleasure Activism

Somatics and Un//masking

Un//masking is an intuitive practice that builds a connection and understanding in tune with your bodymind. It's a practice of checking in with yourself, asking what you need right now and how you can accommodate that. Therefore it can be seen as a somatic practice. Sometimes you won't be able to accommodate your needs, but it still helps you to establish an understanding for them, and makes masking a more conscious choice and process, rather than a subconscious coping mechanism.

When I see small kids, I sometimes get a bit jealous. They are so unmasked, not yet formed by neuronormativity. They inspire me to cry when I am sad, eat whatever I like best, and to take a nap when I am tired. I don't want to romanticise being a kid. I also see them going way beyond their energy levels and often struggling with soothing themselves. But I still think we can (re)learn from kids. From being playful and exploring the world through the eyes of wonder. From worrying less about being perceived and following the intuitions more. It all helps to get into an un//masked state.

Many neurodivergent people have had to learn to function in a neurotypical world, thus often working against self-soothing by layering different masks on their bodyminds. And the prevalent ableist hustle culture doesn't really support being connected to your body either⁴. It's easier to ignore your needs if you remain tense and a bit harsh with yourself. So the relationship to your body might feel quite distant and a bit cold. For years I didn't allow myself to drink water when I was thirsty, or go to the bathroom when I needed to go. It felt good to have control. To be in control of some things at least.

Un//masking is a lot about softening the tensions, so that you can listen. Trade numbing for soothing - stop the punishing and gently ask yourself: what feels safe and won't make me feel worse later?

⁴ More on that, resting and cancelling in issue #3.

“Mind is inextricably entwined with brain, and brain with body; thus, mind is inextricably entwined with body in a single complex system and in a continuous dance of mutual shaping. We’re not minds riding around in vehicles of flesh and bone; we’re body-minds, bodies that think and perceive.”

- Nick Walker, Toward a Neuroqueer Future

But checking in felt hard and overwhelming, because every part of my bodymind needed something. Everything felt like a to-do. Becoming more gentle with myself was a slow process, and I am still learning in many ways. I think it’s about practicing to trust and follow your embodied knowledge - letting go of the need to control. Your body knows what’s good for you and will guide you. Go to the toilet if you have to. Drink water if you need to. Do the small things when they occur to you and you’ll develop the strength to be gentle. What seems overwhelming at first starts to become more clear.

**“Softening the protective shell in safe environments
Their bodies moved freely the way they needed to
Don’t hold it for others”**

- Text excerpt of a LAB participant

A MANIFESTO FOR NEUROQUEER UNMA- SKED

SELF-PRACTICE

by Aby Watson

Create from pleasure, selfhood, joy, and security,
Not from comparison, mimicry, perfectionism, and fear.

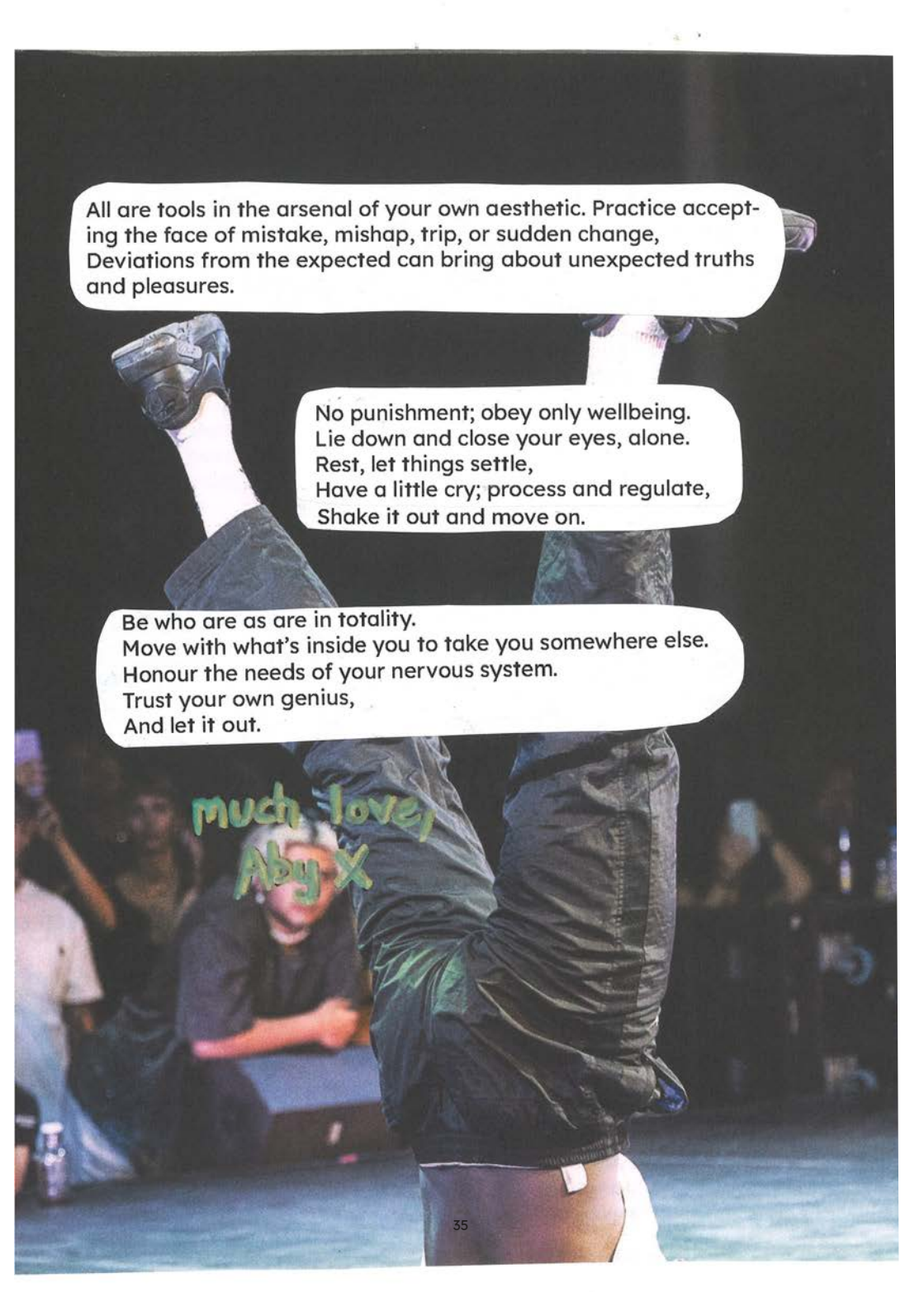
Dance and stimming are somatic acts of self-love,
They are vessels for interoceptive sensing.

Listen to internal feelings, thoughts, sensations across the body-
mind and honour them through practice.

Special interests and healthy hyperfixations are pools of creative
potential.

Allow the joy they give to fertilise the process; be inspired and
unashamed.

Exorcise your thought demons and banish them through dance.
Reclaim and embrace your stigmatised neurodivergent qualities;
Weird, hyper, sensory, clumsy, emotional, intense, sensitive,
out of order, slow, impulsive, repetitive, dreamy, obsessive, in
your own world.



All are tools in the arsenal of your own aesthetic. Practice accepting the face of mistake, mishap, trip, or sudden change, Deviations from the expected can bring about unexpected truths and pleasures.

No punishment; obey only wellbeing.
Lie down and close your eyes, alone.
Rest, let things settle,
Have a little cry; process and regulate,
Shake it out and move on.

Be who are as are in totality.
Move with what's inside you to take you somewhere else.
Honour the needs of your nervous system.
Trust your own genius,
And let it out.

much love,
Aby X

Aby Watson

Aby Watson is a dance artist, maker and researcher based in Glasgow, Scotland. Her practice critically interrogates solo choreography and performance through a lens of the neurodiversity paradigm, and a lived experience of neurodivergence, specifically dyspraxia; a neurotype which affects memory, coordination, cognitive processing, and the execution of movements.

She asks how a dance practice of neuroqueering assists to undo, unloop, and untangle internalised neuronormativity, supports further authentic neurodivergent embodiment, and opens choreographic potentials that diverge from the norm into exciting possibilities.

“Perhaps, dance can become a tool of liberation for the neurodivergent bodymind in and of itself. Not a tool carrying aesthetic legacies of neurotypical masters, and made with mere ‘coping strategies’ of hiding, perfectionism, and overexertion to produce an illusion of the neuronormative gold standard. More radical means are required; neuronormative choreographic aesthetics and methods must be subverted, defied, discarded, and surpassed.”

- Aby Watson, *Disordering Dance*

Un//masking Impressions

from the un//masking LAB

Both dissociative and intensely feeling

“What practices affirm who I am, ways of being that I inhabit and what my body-mind loves/needs/ desires?”

- Xan Dye

The practice of misfitting - embrace the weird

Not maintaining an illusion

“Un//masking for me, in drag gigs, means being able to relax into my performance”

- Tallboy

Practice to ask yourself: what do I need right now?

Breaking the 4th wall

“Allowing my mind’s journey to be seen as opposed to restricting and oppressing it”

- New Kyd

Giving Yourself Permission

During the LAB, Xan Dye often talked about un//masking as a way of “giving yourself permission”. It sounds easy, but it seems to be a key concept. So I started to gather different moments during the LAB, where we mentioned examples of giving ourselves permission.

In the second part of the LAB, Xan hosted a public movement workshop offering their practice which explores the space between stimming and dancing. Through tasks and structured improvisation in a relaxed space, Xan lead the participants to embody rhythm, repetition and what it means to move when their senses are leading. Together, the group played with sensorial movement, voice, drawing, and tactile exploration as ways to process, express, and physically release. All workshop tasks were offered as invitations, to adapt as participants wished, allowing them to find their own way of doing in response to what they needed.

5 You can find Xan’s Full Workshop Score in Issue #4.



Picture from the workshop
«Bodies of rhythm: the space between stimming and dancing» by
participant Évo

In the first exercise, Xan invited people to write down what they were giving themselves permission for during the workshop - a beautiful exercise which really touched me.

Here are the gathered permissions. There are a few empty lines to add your own.

- Permission to misfit
- Permission to soothe yourself during the performance
- Permission to not have a linear progression
- Permission to not have a fixed ending
- Permission to share your feelings with the audience
- Permission to not feel responsible for the audience
- Permission to make eye contact
- Permission to be “unprofessional”
- Permission to being “too vulnerable to perform today”
- Permission to leave structures
- Permission to having less control over what I do
- Permission to “eat and drink during the performance”
- Permission to change the pace of the performance at any time
- Permission to surrender to the fact that a performance is not grand
- Permission to embrace our silliness/playfulness and reinforce that
- Permission to actually offend someone
- Permission to be shy
- Permission to keep my shoes on

- _____

- _____

- _____



A stimulating picture from the participant Évo, drawn at the workshop «Bodies of rhythm» with Xan Dye

Stimming Practices

Stimming is the word used to describe the rhythmic, repetitive sensory-seeking movements that people do to regulate our nervous systems and process our sensory environment.

“Stimming is particularly associated with and important to neurodivergent people who may have a greater need to stim, due to our different ways of processing. Neurodivergent people are often subjected to shame and stigma for the ways they stim”.

- Xan Dye

- **Auditory stims (hearing):**
snapping your fingers, repeatedly touching your ears, listening to the same sound over and over
- **Tactile stims (feeling or touching):**
scratch your skin, tap your fingers, flap your hands or arms
- **Visual stims (sight):**
at lights for a long time, frequently blinking, rolling your eyes, looking at water or fire
- **Vocal stims (voice):**
coughing or clearing your throat a lot, repeating the same word (echolalia), humming
- **Vestibular stims (balance):**
spinning, rocking, pacing back and forth, twirling around
- **Proprioceptive stims (full body):**
swinging arms, yoga, eating a crunchy snack
- **Olfactory stims (tasting or smelling):**
sniffing things or people, chewing, on things licking objects

I feel resistance around committing things to text

It makes me cringe -there's something very exposing about the fixedness and specificity

and yet sometimes it feels critical to produce meaning in this way around the blurry feeling thing that is my movement and performance practice.

There's a need to explain

I want you to know why am I doing this rocking thing -what it means to me -to say something through it and alongside it.

And regardless, artists are continually demanded to justify our work for funding applications, residencies and platforms.

But I am afraid of fixing.

I'll move on.

The rocking practice is robust enough to hold different explorations and shifting emphasis.

The meaning of it will shift in relation to its context -how I share it -when and with whom.

But a written text remains.

I value the ambiguity of how meaning can be produced non-verbally

-relationally.

For what matters to emerge for the person encountering it.

Who are we kidding that we have control anyway.

And then again I want to be seen and read in certain ways -I'm asking for it.

I'm asking for it with these words.

I am Rooted But I Flow

The Waves, Virginia Woolf:

I am rooted but I flow

I am not one and simple, but complex and many.

I notice my rockings in everyday life:

in moments of listening, waiting and wondering.

Rocking as a way to ground

-to stay with the thought -in the conversation -in the room -in my body.

I rock to seek comfort in sitting or standing

a constant negotiation between gravity and verticality.

Rocking offers me a way to be still but not still when stillness is a space for trauma to emerge.

Perhaps rocking is the way the world moves me

A seeking of rhythm and rhythm is pleasure and play and sometimes it is a sort of quietness -a welcome dulling.

Maybe here I'm connecting with the rhythm of my heartbeat

Or recalling the rhythms of the womb.

I revel in the stubbornness of choosing to remain in rocking
-a refusal to progress, to move on, to add more.

It is an invitation to settle in.

To feel out.

Attuning to what's here, what's needed,
what's emerging.

Feeling my edges is part of it.

Rocking as a mediation between inside and outside

Balance and imbalance

negotiating between known and unknown

yes and no

•

Rocking embodies 'both-and'

Both pouring weight into the ground and pushing back out of it

Yielding and resisting.

Moving and resting.

Repeating and shifting into something new.

The trance of rocking can be tuning in and tuning out of conscious awareness

Both dissociative and intensely feeling.

I like that it feels like dancing and not dancing -a crippling, a queering -a neuro-queering of dance

The back and forthing of rocking resists the linear and the sequential:

Instead rocking offers a turning inwards to the ways of moving my body already does -already knows.

I want to share how this speaks to the queer-trans aspects of my being

rocking offers multiplicity of experience

-different expressions -different shapes -different roles

Shifting

Transversing

In rocking I get to be the one holding myself and I get to be held.

Pleasure giver and pleasure taker.

Soft and strong.

Tensing and releasing.

• Skirting felt-flickers of binary gender performativity

retreating from performativity -into sensation -into oblivion

...but not oblivious at all

by Xan Dye

Artist Example:

A M Baggs - In my Language

Next to the work of Xan, a staple artwork when it comes to stimulating is A M Baggs' video piece "In My Language" (8 min 36 s) from 2007.



“The first part is in my “native language,” and then the second part provides a translation, or at least an explanation. This is not a look-at-the-autie gawking freakshow as much as it is a statement about what gets considered thought, intelligence, personhood, language, and communication, and what does not.”

- A M Baggs



I was DJing last night in a club. Midway through the two hour set I could feel my concentration dwindling. As I continued playing, I made a major mistake pressing the wrong button.

The music stopped completely - the most stressful thing that can happen to a DJ.

un//masking diary
march 9th, 2025

Instead of just trying to brush over it in shame, I decided to turn on the mic and said: "Coops your DJ is beginning to be a bit tired up here! Let's keep this energy up together shall we?" I mixed the song that I cut short back in and kept going.

It felt so good to be honest with the audience, and to share my responsibility with them. Mistakes happen, especially at 3AM!

“I am a neurotransgressive Live Artist and identity is important. It’s not even about you. It’s about me. But being a neurotransgressive Live Artist does not necessarily mean being neurodivergent but I made it up and I am dyspraxic. I am clumsy, my co-ordination is off-kilter, and I am dysfunctional when it comes to strategizing, organising, and other things related to executive planning that I can’t remember. I’ve already got myself in a muddle writing this. It’s months after the deadline and I am only here. This is good, because a big part of my own practice of neurotransgressive Live Art is trying to hold a fidelity to all this dysfunction (whilst still trying to be interesting). What emerges might end up being experimental or even avant garde or even risky or even actually quite clever when you think about it afterwards but it also might end up being rubbish. And that’s complicated because sometimes I have to give people who have made performances a grade for their performance and sometimes those people I gave a grade to might come to my performances.”

- Daniel Oliver, Live Art And Neurotransgression

Having Safe Audiences

“Stimming is the word used to describe the rhythmic, repetitive sensory-seeking movements that people do to regulate our nervous systems and process our sensory environment.

Stimming is particularly associated with/ and important to neurodivergent people who may have a greater need to stim, due to our different ways of processing. Neurodivergent people are often subjected to shame and stigma for the ways they stim”.

- Xan Dye

When talking about un//masking a performance practice, you very quickly end up thinking about the audience. In the LAB we explored how performing for an audience heightens everything. While performing for an audience can bring you into states of excitement, it can also be extremely vulnerable.

While performers have a certain power to command the room and to decide what happens next, many of us also felt responsible for holding the room and for fulfilling certain expectations. Some participants said that audiences often expect performers to “know what they are doing”. And that un//masking for them means having less control over what they do.

Another participant said that maybe - even though everything with an audience is very heightened - maybe it's about giving yourself permission that not everything is “grand”. Maybe it's less about delivering, and more about creating spaces which are collectively holding the moment and seeing what emerges. What if the performer can give themselves permission to not feel responsible for the audience and their experience so much, but can stay more centred with their own needs?

What if the atmosphere is shifted and the audience is part of a collective experience and co-responsible for holding and creating a space? We quickly established that un//masking in a performance situation is much easier, if not hyper-dependent on a warm and attentive audience. Un//masking puts some responsibility on the viewer and makes them a more active participant. One participant pointed out that being seen and perceived actually helps them to un//mask.

We came to the conclusion that it's very important to have an audience you feel safe with, one that you want to create a space with. This is of course not always possible, but it's worth thinking about awareness concepts or making conscious choices where you perform. It also helps to prime the audience accordingly and to maybe choose where and in which settings a form of un//masking could happen. Making the audience aware of what you need is actually a way of sharing responsibility for the room that is created. Setting the scene accordingly starts in the promotion process, and is further influenced by the settings and other things such as the host announcements.

ENL

One example that came up in the LAB is the duo ENL, which the LAB participant Zo Hug is part of. Their songs are very honest and vulnerable, their live performances are too. This includes openly talking to the audience about the anxieties Zo had before coming on stage, or taking time for little moments of disorientation or confusion. During the LAB we talked about a queer festival where ENL played right after a drag show which had left lots of balloons all over the audience area. The balloons started popping in the soundcheck, but the festival still kept them around for the gig, even though the duo pointed it out. When the gig started, Zo shared their irritation about the balloons with the audience, and then tried to perform the gig as the balloons kept popping - which was very off putting and irritating for the performers as well as the audience.

At some point Zo had to stop the performance and transparently told the audience that they won't be able to further play with the balloons in the room. As they left the stage in overwhelm, the whole audience helped to bring away all the balloons and to create a space where the duo could safely play their gig.

As Zo shared their story, Ramona - another member of the LAB, said that she was actually in the audience that day, and that she was really glad someone did something about the balloons. She also pointed out that the vulnerable and honest way Zo communicated made her feel very seen, welcomed and also very close to the artist. For me, this was a great example of un//masking and what impact it can have on other neurodivergent people in the audience.

Creating A Collective Experience?

We also talked about the romanticised idea of doing things together with the audience - ideas of a harmonious audience, dreams of a room full of strangers collectively stimming away.

This is easier said than done. Many guests actually don't stim even if they get invited to. Often out of "respect for the show", shyness, tiredness, the fear of being perceived by everyone else in the audience, or unexpectedly having to interact with the performer, or because they are scared of missing something.

Expecting the whole audience to stim with you, also kind of requires that stim to be something which is visible for you as an artist and to other guests. Maybe people are stimming and you don't know about it.

Learning about the different kinds of stims, it dawned on me that many people might actually visit the theatre or dance performance as a form of a visual stim. Maybe they enjoy the repetitive movements of a dance piece or the beautiful pictures created by stage design or lighting.

Some people probably actually appreciate the theatre because it engages the visual stims and can allow a more passive, less visible form of stimulating. The same goes for auditory stims. A concert automatically is an auditory stim, even if you don't move your body at all.

One essential part of creating neurodivergent-friendly environments where stimulating - whatever form this might take - feels welcomed are relaxed performances.

Relaxed Performance

Relaxed performances are an accessibility measure for neurodivergent people, based on the autism community's work in the 1990s rooted in accessible cinema and theatre. Beginning in the UK and now widely spread across the UK, Scotland and Australia, Relaxed Performances are slowly expanding across Europe and the rest of the world.

They offer a warm welcome to people who find it difficult to follow the usual conventions of theatre behaviour. Sitting still for long periods in a confined space, unannounced strong sensory stimuli or interaction, can represent a barrier, especially for neurodivergent people. Relaxed performance takes a laid-back approach and offers a more dynamic theatrical experience, which benefits everyone.

What Makes A Relaxed Performance “Relaxed”?

The responsibility for making a show ‘relaxed’ is shared by the audience, the venue and the performers. The elements they should include are:

- **Nothing about us without us:** A neurodivergent person from the team, or an external neurodivergent consultant has advised on or co-curated the relaxed performance. Ideally this happens from the start of the project, making the relaxed performance is an integrated part of the piece’ .
- **Information:** Pre-show information describing what to expect from the show is available in advance online and on site. (e.g. length of show, content warnings, information about sudden light changes, strong smells, loud noise or any other strong stimuli or surprise effects)
- **Different seating options:** The room offers various seating options. Some which makes it easy to get up and leave during the show, some chairs that are further apart, and some alternatives to sitting on chairs such as beanbags and other soft seating options.
- **Leaving and returning:** Audience members are able to leave and come back in at any point during the show. This includes a welcoming atmosphere for “late” arrivals. The light is adapted accordingly so that the way in and out of the room can always be found.
- **Early Boarding:** The room opens 20-30 minutes before the show, so that people in need of specific seating or adaptation time can enter the theatre space early and get settled.

⁶ See aesthetics of access in Issue #1.

- **Setting expectations:** To prime the audience, there is a clear explanation for all audience members about what a relaxed performance is when they book their ticket. There is also an introduction at the start of the show to remind the audience that it's a relaxed performance, giving anyone who needs to move or be noisy the freedom to do so.
- **Support:** There is trained staff who take an inclusive approach from start to finish. There is also a clear plan for how any complaints from audience members will be managed by the venue.
- **Access support:** Ideally, there is an “access friend” answering your questions and/or taking time to show you around if needed. Ideally, there is also a quiet space outside the auditorium where people can decompress during or after the show if they need to.

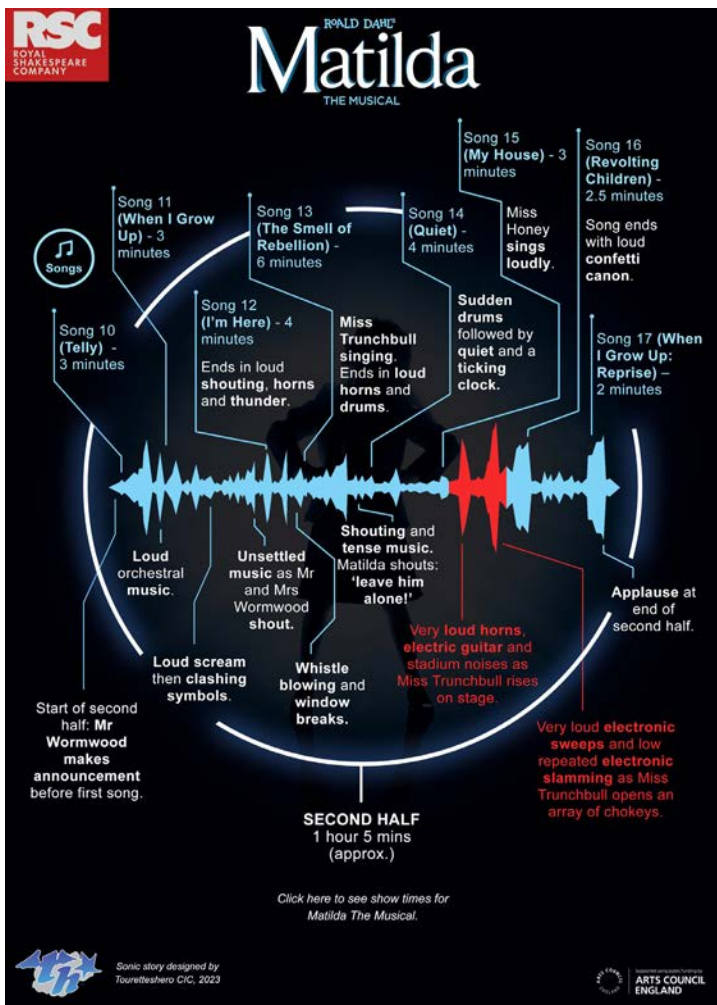
Relaxed Performance Vs. Sensory Friendly / Adapted Performance



A relaxed performance⁷ does not mean that the sensory stimuli (light, sound, potential triggers and unexpected events etc.) have to be cut out or “lowered”. Shows with reduced stimuli are called “sensory friendly performance” or “adapted performance”.

A relaxed performance can absolutely include loud noises or moments of surprise, smells or voluntary audience interactions. Lots of neurodivergent people are actually quite stimulation-seeking and also come to see performances in order to experience these elements. What makes it relaxed is - next to seating arrangements and being able to make noise, leave and come back - that there is transparent information about what can be expected. The elements can be accessed in advance and therefore each person can make an informed decision on which kind of sensory stimuli works for them on that specific day.

⁷ The concept of a “relaxed” space can be adapted to any other kind of event. I shared some of the ways I made the LAB more relaxed earlier in this zine.



Example of a very thorough Sonic Story Design by Touretteshero

An Incomplete List Of Un//masking Practices

I love lists. So to end this zine, here is a loose list of little ideas, bits and strategies helping you un//mask which we gathered over the time of the un//masking LAB.

-->I call it a toolbox. But these aren't tools to improve you. They're an exit from the performance, within the performance.

Creating With Aesthetics of Access In Mind

- Work with neuroemergent time: If you feel unproductive, allow yourself guiltless rest - creativity often comes back when we feel rested. Allow yourself to work in cycles, waves and hyperfocuses. Creativity isn't necessarily a linear process, especially for neurodivergent people. Find openers which allow you to arrive and ground on stage.
- Create moments of potential intensity or repetition to support you fully arriving in your body and performance.
- Bring and include comfort items such as stim toys, fabrics with nice surfaces or your favourite plushy into your performance.
- Include soothing movements and small moments of grounding into your performance (e.g. a breath at the beginning, a hug with another performer on stage, a stim toy, a rocking movement or a gentle stroke for yourself...).
- Find ways to make the backstage public: inviting audiences to partake in preparations, talk about how you feel backstage, change clothes or rest on the stage instead of backstage.

- Include music or soundscapes into the piece that support your un//masking.
- Have a trusted outside eye that knows you well and can propose more moments of un//masking during your creation process.
- Creates “fluid choreographies” that can be performed by more or fewer people, thus allowing for fluctuation and cancellation.
- Create performances that can be adapted by the performers to different modes of energy.
- Create structures that allow flexibility or moments of improvisation. Discuss with the venue the possibility of a small degree of flexibility regarding the total duration of the piece.
- Establish clear boundaries - perform in performances that go beyond your comfort only if you choose that for yourself. Art doesn't have to be uncomfortable for the artist - unless you seek that.
- A DJ I unfortunately can't recall once wrote on their instagram: “One for them one for me”. It really stuck with me. This is your show. Make sure you have fun with it
- Incorporate eating and drinking on stage - take mindful time to do so.
- Create child friendly surroundings: Ask for childcare at the venue for meetings & performances, ask to be able to bring your child, or to interrupt or leave quickly if needed.

Dreadful Admin

Lots of the LAB participants struggle with the admin of performing: answering emails, filling out forms, sending tech riders, writing invoices and applying for funding is hard for us. Of course you will find all the classic “productivity” tips in ADHD, but here is what worked for us:

- Putting on the “admin hat” - literally. Making a hat saying admin, and putting it on, or dressing yourself up in a suit to “play office”.
- Narrate your actions - in the funniest voice possible “Behold the mighty neurodivergent rises from the couch like a Victorian ghost in search of snacks!”
- Building admin sessions on zoom with other artists (called body doubling).
- Ask funders if they provide access measures to help you complete your funding applications.
- Ask for crip time - prolonged deadlines for disabled folk.
- Work with neuroemergent time (see page xyz) - not every day is a good admin day and that’s okay!
- Make an Electronic Press Kit (EPK): an online folder with pictures, promo texts, techriders, access riders etc. which you can send to venues in one link instead of having to search the things each time.
- Allow yourself to work from bed or lying down rather than feeling like you “should be” working on a desk.
- Managing expectations, by communicating availability. Here’s an email signature by the artist Brandy Butler that we really enjoyed: “I work irregular hours. If this message reaches you during a normal time of rest for you, please

excuse the intrusion. Center your own well being & boundaries and get back to me at your earliest convenience. I am also pretty slow with emails, so if you need an immediate response, I am easiest to reach if you contact me by telephone at...”

- Accept that stimulation through caffeine, ADHD medication or other forms of conscious consumption can help getting “in the zone”
- make peace with needing that support. And also: Ask friends to support you with little things you struggle with (phonecalls, application forms, promo, eating before performances...).
- Look into financing an admin support that can take over some of the tasks you struggle with - it’s an access need and that’s okay!

Communication With The Venue & Promo

- Mention and discuss cancellation policies in the contract.
- Set audience expectations already in the announcement to give yourself permission to un//mask later - include descriptions of relaxed performances or your un//masking practice.
- Create an Access Rider and include it in your contract negotiations.
- Stop spending time on correcting your typos in your insta stories.
- Find someone who represents you (e.g. an Agent) who can take over the business chit chat.

Before Performances

- Travel heavy, not light - Pack whatever makes you feel safe and stop being ashamed of having many things, enjoying being prepared and bringing your safety with you.
- If not usual in your field of practice: ask for a tech rehearsal to discuss sound and lights.
- Backstage: stand up for having your own space, maybe also a quiet space to retreat to. Or build your own nest: have exclusive spaces or corners in the backstage where nobody else puts their things⁸.
- Make sure you have your comfort foods/snacks and drinks - bring them with you or ask someone to buy them for you.
- Take a printed version of your tech and access riders to memorise what you agreed on, go check if things are set up as discussed and re-share with venue staff if needed.
- Ask for enough quiet time in the performance space to arrive and feel it out.
- Rituals: find your little solo pre-show ritual (mine is listening to drum & bass).
- Adapt the lights in the backstage to your needs, bring your own lamp if needed.
- Allow yourself to be delayed - crisp time also means the audience can wait a few minutes more.

⁸ Neurodivergent nesting is a practice of creating a personal space that provides sensory comfort and a sense of security. This space — a ‘nest’ — is often characterized by the specific arrangement of items, such as favorite objects, sensory toys and specific foods.

During Performances

- Have a host which supports setting the audience's arrival and their expectations to your needs and likings.
- Keep transparently transferring responsibility for the room setting to the audience and the organizers - before or during the show.
- Choose costumes that feel comfortable.
- Try to make sure the temperatures on stage are comfortable for you (putting it on an access rider in advance if needed).
- Identify and name uncomfortable feelings. Speak out about them if you can, or accept and play with them if possible.
- Structure your performance enough to feel safe, but leave enough room for changes and adaptations while un//masking.
- Establish a performance plan A, B and C and change them according to your state on the day.
- Allowing yourself to struggle with memorizing texts:
 - * Bring a script or cue cards on stage.
 - * Be transparent with the audience when forgetting text instead of playing over it.
 - * Have a person in the audience you can loudly ask form your queue.
- Create breaks on stage, rest visibly
- Eat and drink on stage.
- Think about ways you can go pee during performances.

- Create check-ins with your teammates as part of the performance.

After Performances

- Make space & time to decompress and take sensory breaks after shows - time alone without any input. Letting go of FOMO - allow yourself to take long breaks or leave without hanging out with people after the show.
- Start to understand when you consume substance to un// mask (e.g. come down after a show, cover nervousness, be more “in the zone”. Neurodivergent people are more prone to compensation through addiction⁹.
- Speak up if you would like to change spaces to be able to let go of the performance mode more easily.
- Schedule ghost meetings or “red days” in your calendar to give yourself time to recharge. Include them in your fee.
- Actively ask for feedback if you think it’s “in the room” anyway, but nobody speaks about it - if you would like to know of course. You can transparently say if you are nervous about it.
- Set up a space in your atelier or home where luggage can sit for a few days after shows, until you find the energy to unpack.

⁹ Asked neurodivergent people fall back on a variety of flawed strategies in order to relax, mute our most disruptive behaviours, or conform with neurotypical standards. This can be look like compulsive exercise, calorie restriction, self-harm, excessive consume of alcohol or drugs, abusive domestic relationships, or seeking out approval from high control groups or cults.” (Devon Price, Unmasking Autism)

This is it for now...

Thank you for reading!

The next issue “un//masking the performing arts - on cancelling & rest” will include the following topics:

- Crip Spacetime
- Stimming
- Resting
- Cancelling
- A Cancelling Manifesto

If you are interested in providing a sCRIPt, collaborating on a zine or project, or organising an un//masking workshop or LAB in your city, or any other wild ideas, please get in touch under:

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May 2025



I'm

late...

Handwritten note:
I'm late...
I'm late...
I'm late...