

Corona-Obstructions

How to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Ubuntuhuis with a dance theatre performance during the pandemic. (Susi Rosenfeld & Susan Bink, Utrecht, NL)

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The Ubuntuhuis is a small-scale community center, a place to come together, cook for each other, work and act together inspired by the Ubuntu-philosophy. **Ubuntu** comes from the Zulu saying: "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" and means "I am what I am because of who we all are."

For their 10th anniversary Ubuntu asked Het Wilde Westen, a Community Art Center, to bring together people from Ubuntuhuis, neighbours and artists of the neighbourhood to make a theatre performance together. The celebration shall take place in spring 2021.

We started in February 2020, but could only meet twice before the lockdown. At the time, no group was formed yet and no relationship built up yet, so we had to stop the process without contact anymore. But soon after the lockdown we met again. We got to know each other, had lunch together, sitting and chatting with each other. One afternoon someone started with a djembe and Roos, one of the workers there, played saxophone tunes to the evolving beat.

As we didn't know whether there would be another covid wave coming, we developed a concept that worked both inside the theatre and outside in a park or on the street. The idea is to work with a form of **interdisciplinary collage** that can evolve during the workshops, with music and sound, text, performance, video and light design. Tessel (video-artist) is filming every workshop so that we can make a movie of our project and show that instead of a live performance if necessary. This way of working makes it easier to adjust to new covid-measures so we don't have to cancel everything and also to make it easy for people to take part (again) after being in covid-quarantine. So besides being inspired by the Ubuntu-philosophy, it's also inspired by the Corona-Obstructions.

Over the summer we started with our process **in the park**. A place close to Ubuntuhuis was suited well to work within physical distance because of Covid19, and since the visitors of Ubuntuhuis often go there.

We worked based on the principle of Leading Learner - Learning Leader: We followed the participants and vice versa. We learned 'The Call' from Trinidad and 'O mu losse ma' from Guinea. Susi introduced games and dance movements in a circle. We thought of **celebrating every time we meet**. Which is inspired by people of 'Ubuntuhuis' who told us that they value dancing and playing music as a way of being together in the moment without all the struggles of life.



From the start of our meetings, Susan brought **sticks** with her all along. At our first session in the park someone took two of them to clap along with the djembe beat. Passers-by stopped to have a look and sooner or later they would grab some sticks and join in.

In September we met **inside the theatre** of Het Wilde Westen. On the theatre stage, we put chairs in a big circle with 1,5m distance between everyone. We did our warm-up in front of and next to these chairs. We all wore masks to reduce the risk of infections. We **developed exercises** to get used to the faces covered with a **mask** and to make **eye contact**.

To let us move together we also worked with **larger sticks**, to **keep the distance** and to **connect with each other at the same time**. We also filmed with a camera from the ceiling to experiment with perspectives.

Susan brought **mandarins** that can be easily shared in a safe way because it is wrapped already in its own pulp. Sharing mandarins became a **ritual**, which is nice to do in the park now that we have a second lockdown and our next two classes are cancelled. Susan is carving new sticks out of round wood in the park and people can come and take a mandarin if they want to. By doing that we can **keep in touch** and talk to each other. When it's raining we don't meet.

We will design **different scenarios** for the **celebration** in march as we don't know the obstructions yet. Our idea is that the audience walks in small groups on a route from Ubuntuhuis to Het Wilde Westen. On the way through the neighbourhood, **videos** are screened on houses, **stories** can be heard by mobile phone and **photos** can be seen in windows. In the theatre we can show the **performance** in front of 30 people and **finger food** can be served in the canteine, all with 1,5m distance and by spreading the audience. We're also **spreading public in time**: for example in early try-outs. This makes it also possible to **experiment** with safe ways to **involve the public** in a more ubuntu-minded way. If restrictions allow then we can bring more people together to the final celebration.

The artistic **team** works in this project as a collective. Professionals not only focus on their own disciplines but are also involved in the entire process. They take initiative in the creation process, yet input is expected from all participants.

Susi Rosenfeld (choreographer, dance teacher), Susan Bink (visual artist, performer, artist educator), Tessel Schmidt (video artist), Bart Blijerveld (writer, producer bij Het Wilde Westen), Amjad Dwaer (theatre education student, sound), Reneè Schuurmans (visual art & education student, saxophone), Roos van den Berg-Kres (saxophone), Keon (djembe, history), Ibrahim (light design), Grada Tje (Ubuntuhuis, theatre), Laura van der Hoeven (Ubuntuhuis), Alpha (performance), Barri (performance), Bah (performance; singing), Samson (djembe, video), Merel (video art student), Younoussa (video), Kali (performance), Djallo (djembe), Caspar (music), Tevin (performance), Misbao (performance), ...

www.ubuntuhuis.nl, www.hetwildewesten.nl, www.susirosefeld.de, www.susanbink.nl, <https://tesselschmidt.nl>

