

## **The Whispered Story of Knowledge**

### **The Mobile Academy offers one-on-one conversations with experts for € 1 – an artistic project by Hannah Hurtzig**

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**There is a crush at the counter where the experts are booked. On the stage, forty tables have been set up in four long rows; at each, two people sit facing each other. Bare bulbs dangle over their heads, illuminating the scene. A gong sounds, and everyone starts to speak and gesticulate. Behind them, two women can be seen talking on two large screens. In the public gallery of the HAU the audience listens through headphones.**

The "Hallucinated Community College of the Mobile Academy with 100 experts from Berlin" seems to appeal mostly to people in their mid-20s to late 30s. The Mobile Academy Berlin is a project by the dramatic advisor Hannah Hurtzig in collaboration with the HAU. Hurtzig used all her persuasive powers to secure the involvement of celebrities and experts in this evening's performance: film-maker Harun Farocki, historian Dr Barbara Duden, the deputy Ambassador of India Amit Dasgupta, actress Maria Kwiatkowski and many others. This may be part of the appeal for the public – where else would they have the chance to spend half an hour in conversation with a future researcher, an entomologist, an aviation engineer, a film director, or a violin-maker, for example? There are 42 topics to choose from, ranging from A for Aeronautics to U for Urbanism. Anyone who doesn't want to book an expert of their own can listen in on the dialogues that interest them through their headsets.

#### **"What sound does a penguin make?"**

The experts are seated on the left; to the right are their clients, who listen intently. Just before the gong sounds, they have to place a euro on a marked area of the table. Eager assistants collect the cash. For thirty minutes, the experts share their extensive knowledge, debate with their clients, give a singing lesson, read an aura, or carry out a thought experiment – and may even learn something in the process. Composer Ulrike Haage talks about "treating music and language with equal rights". Harald Preissler, a future researcher with car company DaimlerChrysler, ponders "the dilemma" with his clients. Aura-reader Monika Bruns calmly taps into her client's life energies, unperturbed by the background noise and potential eavesdroppers. Opera singer Burkhardt von Puttkammer expects his clients to play an active role in "singing in the Antarctic": his table is studded with microphones so that the public can listen in. "Imitate a duck!" he exhorts. "And what sound does a penguin make?" Facing him, his female client has to breathe out heavily while emitting a high-pitched hum. The maestro is keen to teach her that the volume of her voice will increase if she uses her whole head as a resonance chamber – but the gong saves her from the unaccustomed challenge. Surfing the eight different channels on the headphones reveals scraps of conversation about the most diverse topics: liberating the body from the constraint of reproduction, the absence of utopias, why penguins have white stomachs ...

#### **Knowledge transfer to the rhythm of the gong**

While the Black Market is running, sociology professor Barbara Duden speaks on-screen about "The body as a place of learning and a scene of forgetting" and is joined in discussion by experts. To follow the on-screen event, the audience has to listen through their headphones. Without the headphones, all that is audible is the animated buzz of voices from the tables – until the gong abruptly sounds and the dialogues break off. There are six sessions in all, with each expert giving one-on-one lessons to two clients. The public listens closely, and every question – no matter how basic – is answered patiently. The clients' enthusiasm was more palpable than the one of the audience and the experts.

"The Mobile Academy always changes location, time and theme, maintaining a consistent intensity and a growing sense of doubt", says Hannah Hurtzig, who designed the project and implements it with changing collaborators. Hurtzig lives in Berlin and works as a freelance dramatic advisor, curator and programming director at international festivals. She was previously the artistic director at Hamburg's *Kampnagelfabrik* and a dramatic consultant to the *Volksbühne* in Berlin. The first Mobile Academy took place in Bochum in 1999, followed by Berlin in 2001 and 2004. It offers intensive interdisciplinary programmes lasting several weeks, as well as one-on-one sessions and "black markets". A Mobile Academy is scheduled to take place in Warsaw in summer 2006, focussing on "Ghosts, Spectres, Phantoms and the Places Where they Live". This joint German-Polish project is supported by Germany's Federal Foundation for Culture.

#### **Knowledge transfer or art?**

So is it knowledge transfer or art? Well, both, really. The strict choreography makes sense, for this is not just a community college event with celebrity guests but a multi-faceted performance. The discussion with Barbara Duden about the body as a place of learning and a scene of forgetting reflects what is happening in the auditorium. The clients sit on the stage; some can be heard live. They are an integral part of the installation.

The performance could be described as a "black market" because the knowledge that is being haggled over here is otherwise unavailable or is very difficult to acquire. So what does she mean by "knowledge and *non-knowledge*"? According to Hurtzig, knowledge appears as the mirror-image of its seeming opposite: ignorance and belief. She sees this black market as a "production and showroom in which narrative formats of knowledge mediation will be tried out and presented.... The transfer of knowledge ... will thus become a collectively whispered story of knowledge ...taking place in the theatre, the original location of public debate".

Long may the Hallucinated Community College continue!

*Ingrid Scheffer, journalist and graduate in cultural studies*  
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