

My Utopia:

How can a safe space give me artistic freedom as an actor with a minority background?

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Abstract

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In this thesis, I examine how I, as an actor with a minority background, can find artistic freedom within white and Eurocentric theatre institutions. Through reflections on my education, professional experiences, and theories of *safe space* and *brave space*, I analyze how structures, pedagogy, and expectations shape the possibility for creating free art. A central question is how institutions can facilitate environments where minority artists feel safe, heard, and able to express themselves without fear.

The thesis compares a traditional Western bachelor's program with little diversity or structural awareness to a more international and reflective master's program that still carries elements of embedded structural racism. Through case studies such as the Sensitive Power Border Course, *Våldets historia*, and courses in decolonial theatre practice, I show how lack of communication, lack of understanding of racism, and insufficient structural support weaken artistic freedom and how an experience of safety and artistic freedom can be facilitated and supported. Interviews with artists and dramaturgs with minority backgrounds further emphasize the need for representation, institutional responsibility, and a shared understanding of *safer space*.

I conclude that *safer space* cannot be created by minorities alone; the responsibility lies with the institutions and authorities who hold the power to shape structures and environments. Artistic freedom arises when I am able to work in places that recognize me as I am, challenge Eurocentric norms, and create room for physical and creative expression without reducing me to stereotypes. My utopia is a space where I can be myself, be seen, feel safe, and be free to create art on my own terms.

Key words: Safer space, Brave Space, Artistic Freedom, Minority Identity, Institutional Power, Whiteness/Decolonization, Structural Racism.

Front page photo: From "Et vårtegn, 2024". Photo: Benjamin Grøtte Sivertsen.

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Terminology

Here I explain the terms used in the thesis. These terms are highlighted to clarify and create a shared understanding and background for the assignment. I am aware that terminology evolves over time, but I have chosen terms that I can stand by today.

Authorities:

In this context, the authorities are the theatre directors, directors, teachers, pedagogues, professors, and the student representative.

BIPOC:

Black, Indigenous and People Of Colour. The term originates in the United States and is linked to racism and discrimination against racialized people or Indigenous peoples.

Black body politics:

Is a political gesture when you put a black body in context of whiteness. It refers to the social, historical and systematic and economically ways Black bodies are perceived, scrutinized, and controlled, treating them as sites of both oppression and resistance.

Colonialism:

A political strategy for taking over other peoples' lands and states, where one controls and exploits the available resources in order to gain economic, strategic, or political advantages. The colonial power also forces its own culture onto the local population and deprives them of their rights.

Eurocentric:

Choosing to view the world from a European perspective. Such a perspective tends to exclude other cultures and is unjustly used as a universal template that suppresses other cultures, even though they have existed long before Europe. The phenomenon also includes placing Europe and the West at the centre and regarding them as the most important.

Home:

Home is, for me, a definition of freedom. Home is a place that is safe and without demands, but which provides room for creativity and dreams.

Institutional racism/discrimination:

Describes how public or private institutions, through their rules and routines, treat people differently based on ethnicity or skin colour.

Structural racism:

Refers to how racial discrimination is embedded in the structures, norms, and rules of society. It is about inequality being reproduced through institutions (school, labour market, politics, housing market) without necessarily involving conscious racist intent from individuals.

The institutions:

Formal and informal institutions. A collective term for theatres, stages, houses, theatre schools, and the family as an institution. A stable practice or norm within a society. (Tjora, 2025)

The Western world/The West:

This is a historical and conceptual construction rather than a simple geographical location. It refers to a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalistic, and secular. The West defined its own sense of superiority and civilization by contrasting itself against a simplified and often stereotyped "Rest" (Hall, 1992). By using this term, I want to highlight how we tend to view issues from a specific standpoint and perspective one that often excludes the ways other cultures or continents perceive the world.

Whiteness:

Whiteness not as a skin colour, but as invisible social hierarchies and power structures which perpetuate racism and in Western and European norms are seen as defining the structure of society.

Freedom of expression:

A principle established in a democratic society, where individuals have the right to express views and opinions freely without prior censorship or prosecution by the authorities.

1. My Origin and Background

Since this thesis examines my own process as an artist, I find it necessary to explore the personal aspects of myself and to view myself from the outside. I wish to map out my own background in order to understand my sense of belonging, my roots, and my journey in relation to the limitations of art.

I am a 25-year-old woman who has been doing acting for exactly five years. These five years have opened up thoughts and emotions that I did not know were part of me. Through acting, I have gained greater access to my feelings and emotions. Previously, I completed compulsory education. I studied a bachelor's degree in social education for one year, and I have worked in social services, where I found freedom in being able to help others.

That I am an actor with a minority background can reduce my ability to create free art. I was born Afro-American but grew up in Norway in a Norwegian family. Culturally, I therefore have a Norwegian background. This gives me certain preconditions when entering the Western art field. Both greater and smaller expectations are placed on me as an artist.

Because of my background in this white institution, I feel uncertain about whom I represent. Every time I do something this is important because my identity and appearance originate from a different starting point.

Throughout my life, I have felt a sense of privilege in being Norwegian, while at the same time feeling like an outsider. I experience discrimination and racism on a daily basis because of my skin colour and ethnicity.

I believe that whiteness has manifested itself in me in every way. In how I speak, how I see myself, what I choose to say, and how I constantly try to do everything perfectly so that society will not punish me for something I have not done or target me unfairly. This manifestation is permanently lodged in my body.

The system has latched onto my body like a fishing net, sewn into my skin, never to come loose. I suffer from the way I am treated and perceived as a result of how whiteness categorizes everything into boxes, thereby excluding me from society.

I am expected to represent, to be a role model, to use my voice to uplift minority actors, while simultaneously being an artist who must sustain myself and create art within a white context. I am expected to impress, bring good energy, and at the same time relax completely and stress down.

I believe my own background plays a much bigger role in the way I think than I am fully aware of when I create and shape art. Not knowing where one is from, what I categorize/consider myself to be, experiences of racism even though I have a white institutional background all of this influences me. I must fit into a world that is not made for me. The Western world.

I think creatively in a different way than the majority and have challenges with structural frameworks. I have a lot of energy, I work hard, and I am goal-oriented. In a white world with different frameworks where one is expected to "relax and just create," I must use this energy to fit in, instead of canalizing it into creative work without having to think about representation and ethnicity.

How do I find my way of accepting and gaining acceptance for the fact that I think differently, not incorrectly, just differently?

I am highly visible and part of a vulnerable group on stage, in rehearsal processes, in casting processes, and really also on a daily basis. But this thesis is not about that. My question is rather: How can I feel safe when facing all these expectations in order to create the art I need to express myself? Is there a tool I can use?

2. Introduction to My Utopia

In this thesis, I wish to reflect on what is required of me as an actor in order to find or create my own freedom within arts. How do the environment and the society around me influence my ability to create or work as a free artist?

Throughout my education and acting experiences, I have often felt dissatisfied. In this thesis, I want to examine the reasons why I feel unsafe. Which factors play a role, which methods trigger me to a greater or lesser degree, and whether I am able to live a sustainable life as an artist.

In her master's thesis, Antonia (2023) writes about what it is like to be a BIPOC artist in the Western, Eurocentric world. She shows how deeply rooted this issue is, touching nearly every conversation, every question, and every situation one encounters as an artist. This accurately describes how I experience the context in which I am expected to create art, and how this context restricts my freedom.

In 2023, I was introduced to the terms *safe space* and *brave space*, which concern diversity and freedom of expression as frameworks for education, creative work, and societal development. In his book on the subject, Palfrey (2017) highlights the importance of diversity as a source of self-expression, learning, and collaboration across differences. I have an utopia of finding freedom in my artistic practice. To achieve this goal I investigate the concept of *safe space* and *brave space*.

2.1. Research Question

How can I, as an actor in a minority position, negotiate artistic freedom in white institutions? What are the possibilities, limitations, and blind spots of structures like *safe(r) spaces* or *brave spaces* in white institutions, and how do they play into questions of freedom?

2.2. Aim of the Thesis

My aim with this thesis is to reflect on the processes and experiences I have gained throughout my acting education. I want to examine my own history and, through the work with this thesis, identify tools that can support me in my professional life so that I can make my artistic practice sustainable for myself. I am concerned with understanding the human aspect and how I can continue to use this as part of my acting competence.

With the help of interviews with two actors and one dramaturg, I explore their experiences of diversity within the acting environment. I want to gain a broader and more nuanced understanding of my past and future, and through this process, help myself move toward finding my artistic freedom.

2.3. Scope of the Thesis

In this thesis, I want to focus on the terms *safe space*, *brave space* and freedom. I am interested in *safe space* as a concept, and how this particular term can help me create free art. By acting in freedom in safe spaces I can achieve motivation and inspiration to do free art and tolerating working in spaces that are orientated around whiteness as the unspoken norm.

I believe that society must take responsibility for creating *brave spaces*. As a minority, one is often given the responsibility to act brave even in situations where the society do not facilitate for *brave spaces*. Minorities are the ones with the least capacity to do so, as we are often perceived as a burden.

By building my own confidence based on freedom, I hope I can practice my art even when institutions do not necessarily facilitate for the artistic freedom that i need.

3. Safe Space and Brave Space as Concepts

3.1.1. Safe Space

A safe space is an environment created to allow participants to engage in conversations about controversial issues with honesty, openness, and respect. The term is often used by educators to ensure that people who feel uneasy around issues of diversity and social justice feel safe enough to share their own thoughts and feelings (Arao & Clemens, 2013).

The purpose of a *safe space*, according to Palfrey (2017) is to enable the student to clarify and develop ways and tools for creating coping strategies and effective communication strategies that promote tolerance and counteract stereotypes and hatred.

Both of the works mentioned above use the term safe space. I experience that this term is not entirely adequate, because the kind of safety required cannot be fully created. This is also pointed out by both sources. Nevertheless, they choose to continue using safe space. However, one cannot guarantee that everyone will feel safe at all times, but we can work towards it. It is therefore quite common to use *safer space* as a more appropriate term (Ylläpito, 2025), and I have chosen to use this concept in this thesis.

To achieve such a space, clear rules and structures are required. These rules differ from those of public spaces because they are more precise and narrower than the general rules of freedom of expression. This is to ensure that the space remains supportive and provides a foundation for a positive atmosphere.

The general rules for safe space are (Elokapina, 2025):

Don't assume. You cannot know another's experience, thoughts, life situation, or self-defined identity better than they do. Discrimination can manifest itself as (for example, but not limited to) homo- and transphobia, sexism, racism, age or class discrimination, or ability prejudice. Since we are constantly making assumptions about others, try to be aware of your own assumptions. Be open and listen.

Be respectful. Don't question another's differences.

Give space. Make sure everyone is heard and involved in the conversation.

Palfrey (2017) is clear in his book that there are misunderstandings surrounding the concept and how such a room should be used. *Safe space* is not about superficial environments where the atmosphere feels cozy and warm, with soft pillows. It is about serious pedagogical environments intended for personal development and support.

Arao & Clemens (2013) point out that the demands for safety in a safe space can function as a form of privilege, where the dominant group attempts to define how they wish to be confronted. For BIPOC individuals or other minorities, however, a safe space may appear as a false concept, since everyday life can be, or already is, marked by systematic oppression that does not disappear simply because one is present in a specific space.

3.1.2. Brave space

Brave space is described as courageous spaces. It is a continuation of the concept of *safe space/safer space*. It is used as an alternative to the traditional idea behind *safe space*, as that concept is perceived as unattainable.

To achieve the ideal of a *brave space*, one must adhere to the principles of freedom of expression (Palfrey, 2017). In contrast to a *safer space*, intellectual friction may arise, there must be room for discomfort, uneasiness, or challenging topics for individuals. The aim is for participants in such environments to learn to confront the unfamiliar and thus grow intellectually.

Arao & Clemens (2013) therefore, encouraged to use *brave space* instead as an alternative term. Here, the focus shifts from safety to courage, acknowledging that learning involves risk and discomfort. Participants are nevertheless encouraged to remain engaged in dialogue despite the discomfort.

Using *brave space* at the beginning of a workshop or class changes the atmosphere in the room. The intention is for participants to put on their critical lenses from the outset and to turn the group's norms and rules into a shared learning process rather than an administrative formality. The goal is for participants to dare to position themselves at the outer edge of their comfort zone in order to maximize learning (Arao & Clemens, 2013).

In an educational context, it is recommended that the majority of time be spent in *brave spaces* rather than *safer spaces* (Palfrey, 2017). It is also unhealthy to exist exclusively in *brave spaces*. One needs *safe spaces* for recovery and support, but it is in the brave space that development occurs. By operating in *brave spaces*, students are trained to handle different mindsets, viewpoints, and difficult topics. These are essential skills for becoming an engaged citizen.

Both *safer spaces* and *brave spaces* vary between institutions and according to personal goals and values. Educators should strive to create environments that challenge and support each individual student. Palfrey (2017) also notes that *safer space* and *brave space* can sometimes be blended, but this requires clear frameworks from the outset. What is essential is that education should not position diversity in opposition to freedom of expression but instead seek meeting points where these concepts reinforce one another.

3.2. Artistic Freedom

Freedom in this thesis refers to the right to act and make choices in the artistic process without limits or being held back by how I am perceived. Freedom is the feeling of being able to express oneself in one's own way within the principles of expression.

In this thesis explore artistic freedom. I will pursue the right to express myself creatively, aesthetically, and intellectually without experiencing harassment, censorship, defamation, hate speech, or threats. Freedom also refers to not always carrying the responsibility associated with marginalized groups such as BIPOC or other ethnic identities but instead creating art that is free from these frameworks. Creative freedom means having the ability to make independent choices in the artistic process regarding form, material, theme, and content.

For me, artistic freedom is about being able to let go and dare to break the rules that society has defined. It is about not holding back ideas, even when they are absurd or difficult to understand. Often, when I create my own art, it is different from what people expect.

Freedom is fundamental to understanding what it means to be human. It is also the right and the ability to live an authentic life, to shape one's own values, and to have control over one's presence and background, as well as to make artistic choices without unnecessary disturbances tied to one's heritage or identity. By defining freedom and artistic freedom, it becomes easier to achieve it in my artistic practice.

4. Education and Selected Acting Tools

I have a five-year education consisting of a bachelor's degree from Norway and a master's degree from Finland. I have a classical education from Westerdals, where the methodological foundation was based on Stanislavski from a western perspective.

My master's degree from Finland is built on a more international framework, post-dramatical courses where the main acting tool is based on energies, and where the school also works with guest teachers offering methods such as Meisner and Brecht. During the master's, we also have the option to choose between many different courses such as EKO somatics, movement classes, and various others. In the master's program, there are also courses that cut across different disciplines, meaning courses with dancers, dramaturgs, etc.

I experience that, in both my bachelor's and master's education, I have found my own ways of using tools and methods that work for me. This does not mean that they are necessarily sustainable in the long term, but they have helped me in my interpretation of Western art. I wrote about these tools in my bachelor's thesis (Skudland, 2024), and I want to highlight them in this thesis because I continue to use these tools and methods in my artistic practice.

In my bachelor's thesis, I describe my development and real-world competence after three years in the following way:

Throughout the study program, I have spent time and effort understanding my personal development. One must give oneself time and space to allow method work and other work to find its place within one's own body. Acting is made up of processes both big and small.

When I was on exchange in Finland during the 5th semester, I learned many valuable tools. I learned that life experience and real-world competence are what primarily allow you to grow as an actor. One must acknowledge one's own character in order to enter other characters and consciously remove or add elements of oneself. I believe that what shapes you as an actor consists of: talent, background, upbringing, lived experience, mindset, and education.

My real-world competence is a result of my education, but also of where I come from, who I am, and the experiences I have had in life. I choose to use this competence to communicate acting through a basis in myself, by connecting my own experiences with the characters I portray (Skrudland, 2024).

5. The Multidimensionality of my Education and Its Facilitation

I have completed my education at two different theatre schools and therefore have different experiences related to *safer space* within institutions. Here, I examine the emphasis placed on *safer space* throughout both educations, with special focus on my own process.

Both institutions have strong qualities but also different structures, frameworks, and perspectives, which makes them complex to compare. Below, I present a structural overview of the two schools.

5.1. Kristiania University of Applied Sciences / Westerdals

Westerdals is an institution that trains actors through traditional Western theatre pedagogy, emphasizing classical methods. The school states on its website: “The study emphasizes Stanislavski’s system but also explores other approaches and methods to acting.” (*Skuespill – møt studieprogramleder*, 2026) The institution has low diversity, and I experienced little emphasis on creating *safer space* from leadership, pedagogues, or fellow students. During my three years at Westerdals, I was the only student in the acting program with a BIPOC background.

Strengths:

The school admits students based on skill level. One becomes highly competent in Western acting techniques predominantly based on Stanislavski, valued in traditional "Western" theatre. The theatre history exam assignments were engaging and challenged me artistically, provoking reflections that pushed me to seek out additional material.

Critique:

Social issues are not addressed. Problems are not resolved; instead, students are left to discuss them among themselves. Structural and institutional issues are not given enough weight to prompt change. Courses are based solely on Western methods. The theatre history curriculum has not reflected on the impact of art on diverse representation. Colonialism and other global topics are not part of the curriculum. I experienced the school as having a purely Eurocentric perspective. There appears to be only one valid way to do art/acting. I question the basis for casting decisions in major and minor productions. Representation was never prioritized. Lack of diversity among students. Too many students per teacher.

5.1.1. Traditional Western Theatre Education

I received a traditional Western theatre education at Westerdals and the Theatre Academy. Here, I was introduced to the classical methods of Stanislavski and Meisner. In addition, I worked with Nadine George Voice Work, which is more unconventional.

5.1.2. Stanislavski as a Working Method

Stanislavski's *method of physical actions* is built on having an objective something the character wants to achieve. To reach that objective, one must try out different tactics. These tactics contain obstacles that make it difficult to reach the objective. Stanislavski works with having something physical and concrete to engage with while performing, so that the actor does not become overly fixated on the private or the personal. He believed that the art becomes stronger when the actor is not self-absorbed.

Today, I benefit from the method both consciously and unconsciously. Often when I receive a script, I work systematically with action-based analysis. Considering that I find myself in a Western context, I experienced that this method can help me navigate the kind of art that is created and performed here.

My critique, however, is directed at the school's Eurocentric perspective. I experience that this type of perspective excludes the ability to think or act outside this mindset. When using Stanislavski, I often find myself as an outsider because I am simply not made for, or do not have the experiences required to perform within, this method.

Throughout my bachelor's education, I experienced that this method left little room or time to discuss viewpoints and the context of the material. Within the material, there are many hierarchical problems as well as structural racism something that becomes a heavier and heavier burden for me as an actor with a minority background.

One problem is that the method is taught as universal, nor do they highlight that this and other Western methods are not the only approaches an actor need. I have even experienced the method being treated almost as "sacred."

I believe that the consequence of such an education is that I have become marginalized. I have become a very skilled actor for playing fragile feminine characters. I have been trained technically, but the person behind all the technique is not doing well. I feel no joy in creating art within these frameworks and structures.

I experience that the lack of freedom and accommodation has left a significant emptiness in me as an actor. I would argue that through my education at Westerdals, I have carried with me negative imprints that remain with me as an artist.

5.2. The Theatre Academy / Teaterhögskolan

I studied at the Theatre Academy from 2024–2026, where my professor was Aune Kallinen.

The Theatre Academy states on its website that: “The content of the teaching is permeated by an active decolonization of all study modules and opens up different contexts for creating art.” (*Skådespelarkonst på svenska, kandidat och magister, 2025*)

The Theatre Academy is far ahead in terms of pedagogy, structural awareness, and international perspectives. The school collaborates frequently with guest institutions. Programs like Nortea and Erasmus exist specifically to create an international foundation for the education, and the school uses them actively. The Theatre Academy is performative and educates actors who can work both within and outside institutional frameworks.

I found the school to have high diversity among both students and staff though still lacking BIPOC representation.

Strengths:

Openness to discussions, difference, and attempts at genuine understanding.
 Seeing each student as an individual. High diversity within the class. Flexibility.
 Continuous engagement with international and societal issues. A variety of courses aligned with students’ interests, as part of a master’s program. Diverse faculty backgrounds. Guest teachers from various countries and cultures.
 Courses on theatre history and its impact. Artistic research and approaches that integrate theatre history into practice (performance-based work). International orientation and an understanding of non-Western art traditions.

Critique:

Time management, who speaks, and in which context is the information relevant to the actual topic. Punctuality and lack of discipline in fulfilling tasks. The class, in my opinion, has too many differing needs. There is no space for the ones that needs it the most. The artistic freedom in the class is so strongly emphasized that it sometimes undermines safer space for those who don't have it. I began to feel dissatisfied when the conversations started to focus on elements other than the concrete themes. I often experienced that when minorities speak, no one from the majority takes the floor or responds. This creates a sense of marginalization or negative feelings for the minority when not everyone takes responsibility in the situation. The school also have the tendencies to say that it is a safe space, but I have found myself in situations where the space was made with uncomfortableness a marginalized feeling. Safer space guidelines can't just be a symbol.

5.2.1. Nadine George as a Working Method

In my bachelor's thesis, I described this course as follows (Skrudland, 2024):

During my study stay in Finland, I was introduced to Nadine George's technique Voicework. The course was taught by voice pedagogue (lecturer) Stina Engström at the Swedish-speaking Theatre Academy in Finland (Röst & Tal 1 (T-SB24221), 2024). Engström uses the method as a philosophy and refers to it as "energies." Engström argues that this is an effective theatrical method that actors can use to convey text in a truthful and credible way. She has further developed Nadine George's exercises by making masculine and feminine energies gender neutral.

The theory is that the body is always in possession of some form of energy. By becoming aware of these energies, one can express oneself more emotionally and open up a broader and more precise emotional range, while still maintaining stability.

I am writing about this method here because it has awakened emotions in me that are essential in relation to the range I possess as an actor, and I believe that parts of this method can help guide me on the path toward artistic freedom.

This method works with the energies that exist in the moment. Nadine describes four different energies: “HOO, HAA, HUU, HAA.” The first two are masculine energies, and the latter two are feminine energies. The method focuses on vocal work and the interplay between voice and body. One acknowledges oneself, one’s impulses, and one’s emotions, and these are given space in the practice. It is important to take care of and make use of the energy that already exists in the body at any given moment.

My encounter with ” Energies” method was very personal. I was on exchange in Finland as part of my third year of the acting bachelor program at Westerdals. At this time, I had only been trained in analytical, classical, and theoretical method work. This was my first encounter with a non-classical method a method centred around acknowledging the energy one already has and placing the personal at the center of expression.

In my view this method also has its roots in the Western world since it is based on the screams of dying people in European wars. The method itself has the potential to create *safer space*, but it can still be influenced by the Western backgrounds of the participants. It may not have hierarchical differences in terms of structure, yet I still experience that differences in class, background, and ethnicity in the room can hinder *safer space* for everyone.

When the method is used within a white landscape, and non-Eurocentric perspectives are not integrated, the method becomes limiting. While working with this method, I have alternated between feeling free and feeling trapped. To reach the feeling of freedom, a substantial amount of courage is needed, because this method opens up all past experiences and traumas held within the body.

6. Case studies

In this chapter, I highlight important courses I have participated in that address themes relevant to the research question. The topics covered include structural racism, white fragility, positions of power, boundary-setting, and freedom.

6.1. Sensitive Power Border Course

During the first part of my exchange stay here in Finland, I attended the Nordea course “Sensitive Power Border Course,” where the theatre field from the Nordic and Baltic regions gathered to discuss boundary-setting, power structures, and sensitivity in performing arts and how we can consciously relate to these issues within institutions. Students, pedagogues, professors, and deans from Nordic and Baltic theatre schools participated, and several artistic disciplines were represented.

Communication is the most important tool in building *safer space* and *brave spaces* whether verbal, physical, or even psychological. What matters is communicating in ways that make everyone feel seen and heard. We do not need to agree but we need to remain open.

The course desired to create a brave space, where difficult topics could be discussed in a generative way. For me, the course became a “trauma space.” After the course, I wrote the following poem:

I remember how I stormed out of the course, crying in despair over witnessing a dean in a position they themselves did not understand. I remember how the course was supposed to be about building bridges between people and nations. I remember how minorities were expected to take responsibility for the discussion. I remember how a fellow student said, I cannot carry this responsibility again. I remember how the structure grew and grew. I remember how the visibility of racism became clearer and clearer. I remember how all the pedagogues tried to defend their own roles instead of taking in the situation. I remember how I gradually lost the right to speak and express myself.

I remember how my heart pounded and pounded. I remember how I could not find words...

I remember running to my professor with tears stuck in my throat...

I remember that I could not articulate the situation...

This I remember.

To

This

Very

day!

The course was my first encounter with structural and institutional racism, where I experienced it firsthand. It was a two-week course in which we were meant to explore complex and difficult topics in depth. The course began with us writing down what we were interested in exploring and then forming groups to discuss the themes more thoroughly.

The group I was in felt good and safe. Early on, we made a clear choice to focus on positivity on what we had in common and how we could communicate in ways that made everyone feel included. We focused on getting to know one another across countries and cultures. My group presented our work to the other groups through acting exercises or other simple methods that did not require much time or resources, allowing us to spend more time on the actual themes.

Almost every day during the two weeks, I experienced positivity from my group. Everyone was free to express themselves, and the discussions were fruitful even when we disagreed. However, in the larger group sessions, I often felt pressure and a lack of listening. Throughout the course, it became clear that the institutions were not genuinely interested in the issues that existed. They wanted to talk about diversity, gender roles on stage, and how such discussions could lead to learning. The problem was that those of us who represented diversity neither had the capacity nor the desire to share personal experiences in a constrained space.

In plenary, the work took place in a blackbox with leaders and various authorities present. As a result, I felt that these authorities almost expected us to speak, even when it was clear that minorities did not want to. Time was a scarce resource, and I felt that minorities gained little from the course.

It was in this claustrophobic room, on the second-to-last day, that the course escalated. The dean on the Finnish side entered the room without shoes to show that he understood the issue, but he did not understand his own privilege or the context, and the participants were provoked. Even though he had misunderstood, he held a long speech about what the industry needed in terms of diversity and representation, and how the course could be used to influence this.

Small groups began discussing the fact that authorities cannot demand or decide when information that does not concern them should be shared. More and more participants joined the discussions, and the entire course spiraled. Other authorities, who also did not understand the issue, tried to calm the situation and suggested that we return to our previous groups, so we did.

When we returned to the plenary session, a student with a minority background asked out loud: “Who are we doing this for?” The mood shifted completely, and the dean immediately responded with something racist. The student replied, “Now you’re being racist.” Several white participants then jumped in to defend the authority. The situation escalated again, and the authorities and professors attempted to downplay everything.

It was clear that the authorities were incapable of understanding the meta-layers of the conflict. This meant that we, as minorities, once again had to carry the responsibility to explain, or attempt to create a *safer space* for minorities.

In this scenario, it should have been the authorities who reflected inwardly, analyzed the situation, and handled the incident in relation to their own position how they reflect and listen in a chaotic situation that they themselves have created.

The final day consisted of superficial conversations and discussions meant to dampen the events of the previous day. I felt empty and drained of energy. During the course, I talked with the group I belonged to and had grown close to. But the course left a mark on me, and I often experience in classroom settings that similar patterns appear, making me uncomfortable, diminished, and uncertain about my own position, origin, and background.

6.2. Course in Theatre History for Bachelor Students at the Theatre Academy

This is a course that does not technically belong to my program of study, but Professor Aune Kallinen strongly encouraged me to attend because of my background and heritage. The course was led by Geoffrey Erista and Lehmus Mur. It took place over four sessions and focused on anti-racism and colonialism. We explored our own origins and backgrounds in depth and became aware of our privileges in a theatrical context. And it was clear that this course worked on *brave space* principles. We discussed questions such as: “What is the first thing the audience notices about you as an actor on stage? “Where do you position yourself within the hierarchy? “What privileges do you have that you are not aware of?”

As a result of the discomfort of being in *brave space* It did not take long time before discussions drifted toward themes of gender and sexuality instead of remaining focused on colonialism and anti-racism this is often called white fragility. One student did not understand the difference between oppression based on sexuality and oppression based on race. As a result, the discussion shifted, and our professor who was also attending the course clarified that the course specifically concerned colonialism and racism. they reminded us that this room and this context were not about the oppression of white minorities.

For me, this is a good example of pedagogical leadership setting clear boundaries so that discussions do not devolve into personal defensiveness or self-victimization disconnected from the topic. The course also provided a healing counter-experience after the traumatic encounter I had in the Sensitive Power Border Course.

6.3. Power structures and hierarchies in the theatre institution, including racism, and how they affected my ability to find artistic freedom

As part of my education, two fellow students and I were given an internship at the Helsinki City Theatre's Swedish stage, Lilla Teatern, in the production *Våldets historia/History of Violence*. The play is highly complex and engaging, and it addresses themes such as institutional power, social class, racism, homophobia, and structural violence.

Throughout the process, I reflected on many complex questions. Here, however, I will focus on artistic freedom.

The rehearsal period for *Våldets historia* by Édouard Louis lasted approximately four cycles of two weeks. We began the process with a traditional table read, where everyone involved in the production was gathered in the same room.

I struggle with reading aloud and often panic when I have to do so. Knowing that a table read was coming, I prepared early by learning the text so I would not stumble over the words. To create freedom, I used initial phase to read through the script in peace, without worrying about being heard or judged.

On the second day, we slowly began to work on the floor with Act One. I tried to let go and not remain stuck in my head. This became easier when I felt welcomed and creatively accepted by my colleagues. This is where my journey with freedom in the production truly began.

I arrived on time. I tried to do everything correctly and allowed myself to be influenced by what my fellow actors brought to the scenes. The rehearsals went well in the beginning. But one evening, everything shifted.

We had evening rehearsals throughout the process. The atmosphere was good until one of the actors began correcting several of us on the text. The mood in the room changed instantly. We continued working until the director suddenly said we were done for the day.

As a newly graduated actor with little professional experience, this felt uncomfortable and confusing. I tried to brush it off and continue. The only thing I could think was that I must have done something wrong, but it later became clear that this was a pattern well-known among the director and actors at the theatre.

One day, our voice teacher visited us during rehearsals. That day we worked on scenes that I led. In the first act, I played Laura. This character is written as a classic victim role. Laura has changed schools several times and is also a victim of bullying. She lives in a foster family and in the play, she is bullied in the same way as the main character, Eduard, and through this shared experience of bullying, they seek comfort in one another.

I received a note from the director: my character needed to be “stricter.” I disagreed because of the contextual implications and clearly expressed that I did not want the character to become a stereotype. I did not want to play the classic bullying victim who is indifferent or shows no form of empathy. A character who is very one-dimensional and who clearly struggles with their own behavior and with how they function within a school context. Another stereotype concerns people from minority backgrounds, who are often portrayed as problem children because they have a different energy and way of being. The problems with the character arise as a consequence of the role being written as white. People like me encounter difficulties in performing the role in the same way as a result of Black body politics.

In my view, the director became upset, and the working dynamic shifted. The artistic freedom disappeared for me. Although I cried in that moment, it was not dramatic, instead, it raised larger questions about how communication impacts the situation.

In Act Two, I play a complex character: a sister trying to explain a traumatic event that occurred a year earlier. Her brother comes to visit to explain that he has been raped by an “Arab.” The sister, whom I play, explains her version of events to her partner when he returns home from a business trip.

From the beginning, I felt a lack of safety into this role and sensed that everything had to be done exactly the way the director had envisioned. I had several conversations with him, explaining why I could not play the scene in the way he wanted. His version turned the character into a stereotype of an unsympathetic American housewife who talks without listening the opposite of what the scene requires. The character is meant to evoke sympathy and be comically relatable, in contrast to her self-centred partner.

In that moment, I experienced a lack of understanding, or perhaps a lack of knowledge, regarding Black body politics. I am a dark-skinned Afro-Latin actor, and my skin colour will always be visible on stage no matter which role I play. If I am to play a girl in foster care, I refuse to portray her through stereotypes that can negatively affect others. As an actor, I do not find it meaningful to create characters that reinforce harmful societal narratives about minorities. In this case, the director’s suggestion would have made the character a stereotype. Importantly, the character is not written that way in the original book or the dramaturg’s adaptation.

I describe this event because it illustrates a situation where my artistic freedom disappeared. The actor’s concerns are not met, acknowledged, or processed. When my attempt to creat artistic freedom is dismissed by the authority figure, it becomes difficult and impossible to restore later.

When an actor plays a role in which they do not feel heard, the role becomes unsafe to perform. As actors, we are responsible for our own creative process, and I’m grateful that I ultimately performed the role in a way that allowed me to feel secure exploring the human being behind the foster-care character rather than portraying her as loud, aggressive, or rude. I believe that actors should absolutely play characters they disagree with but they must be able to play them in a way that allows them to feel safe within the role.

It does not matter how many times a white person try to convince me that this stereotype isn't offensive. I am the one who feels its consequences in my body and lived experience. If the authority does not understand the representation, they cannot understand why the direction feels wrong. In such cases, the actor with lived experience must be given definitional power.

As a result of these disagreements, the character still feels unresolved. The director now avoided giving me notes because he feared I could not play the role the way he wanted. We no longer communicated, and we spoke different artistic languages. This affects the entire ensemble. Nobody intervenes because they lack knowledge of the issue.

Theatre should be playful, but what kills the playfulness? For me, this role had neither play nor optimism. And I refer here to myself as a private person, not the character.

Time is rarely given to understand or process uncomfortable topics. Still, there were also moments of safety and learning during the production. Communication is essential for mutual understanding and professional collaboration.

Lack of understanding of my need also lead to secondary consequences for example, improper lighting for me as dark-skinned actor. Therefore, I played the second act in the dark with wrong light tones. I experienced this as a major lack of artistic freedom. I got the director to come to see the performance with a specific instruction on whether he saw me or not. He decided to sit in the fourth row in the place where you can see me the best, and he said there were two places where I was dark. So I can't imagine what it was like to sit on the balcony and watch the play without proper lights. This affected the quality of the second act and impacted my experience of being on stage.

When a dark-skinned actor is cast in a complex and challenging role, the production must actively consider how to support them, since they begin in a more vulnerable position. If one character makes racist remarks, the production must consider how to balance this through direction, dramaturgy, or casting. If there is insufficient knowledge, resources, or willingness to address such issues, the consequences fall on the actor.

As mentioned earlier, the responsibility lies with the authority directors, dramaturgs, theatre managers, not the actor. I can't make the artistic freedom by myself and I'm already needing a lot courage just to be in the space. When I don't have the artistic freedom it makes it impossible for me to create. In the end I only worked with surviving the stage and the situation. And I hated to play the second act throughout, and it killed the art in me!

As a result of this production, I will never again join a cast that does not take responsibility for its actors when it comes to difficult topics that concern private individuals as well. If I discover during a process that this responsibility is absent, I will withdraw from the production.

6.4. Nene's Course "Lines, rivers or bodies" an example of freedom

In the second year of my master's degree, I participated in the course "Lines, rivers or bodies." The course was taught by Raul "Nene" Vargas Torres, who describes the course as: "Movement research for actors and dancers." This course was my first encounter with freedom in my own work during my five-year actor training. The course was largely driven by impulses and active presence in the moment.

Through my engagement with this course, I found space to let myself go. I did not have to focus on specific tasks or structures and was therefore not placed into a predefined box. Because improvisation in itself placed such high demands on listening and presence, everyone was focused on their own intentions and performance.

One of his central questions is, "How do we depsychologize the practice and give space to the body beyond meanings? 'If I don't practice this kind of art more than twice a month, I go crazy.'" (Raul, 2026)

On Nene's website, the course is described as follows:

“We are, constantly, affecting or affected by some(one)thing. This is maybe why we feel drawn, impelled, or restrained by incomprehensible forces to trust, love, hate, consume, create – desire.

In the light of this, the workshop proposes a variety of instructions, discussions, and practical improvisation exercises that give space to a multiplicity of encounters between the body and the external world, objects, ideas, text, memory, and the experience of other bodies.

How do we create (a) space for something to happen? To what extent is the individual the context itself? What mediates our impulses or capacity for action? What are the limits of the self's idea in a metastable space? (Raul, 2026).

The course did not follow the same frameworks and structures as the previous courses, and perhaps that is why it created a sense of freedom. Throughout the course, I experienced a strong presence of both safer space and brave space.

*Sometimes
you do not know
that you have been without freedom
until you experience freedom itself.*

For the first time in my career, I experienced what artistic freedom can be and what it is. This course challenged everything I had learned about psychology. Because the course leader was Colombian, I felt seen, heard, and understood by an authority figure. Whiteness was not embedded in the structures, and I experienced fewer limitations on how I could and wanted to express myself.

As the course worked to dismantle hierarchies and the human need to be at the center, I was also able to engage with themes and contexts that were not Eurocentric. As a result, I experienced the space as more inclusive and as a safe environment, where safer space was also present.

This method was eye-opening for me because it gave me freedom within my own body. It was enough simply to exist in the given moment and to accept whatever happened inside my body during the exercises.

Through this work, I realized that much of the method training I had previously done actually limited my artistic potential rather than making my abilities and skills, shaped by both heritage and environment, truly accessible.

I need method training in order to perform the work required of an actor in the Western theatrical landscape. However, the amount and the type of methods used are what I question.

6.5. Course in Contemporary Theatre History for Master Students at the Theatre Academy

One of the final courses at the school during the last term of the master's program was "Transnational perspectives in contemporary performing arts in the Nordics" The course leaders were Oo Condit and Paria Mohajerani. The course guided us through invisible and forgotten histories. It had a clear and well-structured format, beginning with an exploration of the experiences of BIPOC people and how we can imagine ourselves into the future. It was also mentioned that change does not need to take five years; it can happen within five seconds.

We were then introduced to the Indigenous people of Finland before the country became a nation. Went to see the general rehearsal of "Swedish Asshole" at Theatre Virus. Later, the course covered the history of Finnish performing arts, and the class visited an art gallery featuring the exhibition "Invisible race."

I found this course to be highly meaningful and very well structured. It encouraged me to reflect on my own origins and background. I felt seen and heard throughout the course. The course leaders did not expect individuals to share knowledge, but rather created space for thought. Through the course, I experienced a greater sense of freedom than I have felt in other theatre history subjects, and within this particular course, I felt a remarkable degree of openness.

I believe it is unfortunate that the course appears more like an embellishment at the end of the program. A course like this, in my view, should be part of every year of study, helping students reflect and further develop their skills within theatre history. Now I believe that there is hope in the pedagogy.

7. Tools against Traditional Frameworks and Traumas

Throughout this thesis, I have focused on how I can achieve freedom within my own art. But to attain freedom, I must first understand what this concept means to me.

In my bachelor's thesis, I wrote about the process of creating the theatre production "Et vårtegn" (Skrudland, 2024). I explored the human condition, connected this to the methodological work on energies, and questioned what is perceived as credible. Furthermore, I described how I gathered material for the performance and explained what a traditional Finnish sauna is.

My encounter with the sauna landscape, was revolutionary for me because I discovered different perspectives and methods of working that I was genuinely interested in exploring further. When I created the performance, I did not yet know that the sauna was my "home."

The sauna makes no cultural or social distinctions. This is perhaps the aspect I personally experience as freedom simply being human. Being able to create and produce art without adding layers of expectations such as representation and diversity. This type of production felt like true art to me.

Another choice I made in my bachelor project was to invite audience members whom I considered safe to have in the room during the performance. These were people I wanted to welcome into my home. This choice was made to protect the sense of safety and respect for the material and for myself. To be able to express myself freely, without becoming a guest in my own work, without carrying the expectations of the audience or their reactions this was crucial for the feeling I was left with afterward.

The dream was also realized through having a team of artists who believed in the project and helped open the space, articulating thoughts I may not have had the words for myself. Together, we created a *safe space* in the working group, even though we had not been introduced to that concept at the time. We created a home for each person in the group, reflecting together, asking questions, and staying curious without fearing discussions about themes we did not personally represent. Perhaps *safer space* is achieved when one no longer is a guest, in other words, when one exists within one's home?

7.1. Freedom Through Physical Expression

In relation to my pursuit of free art, I also want to return to physical movement expressing something larger than myself, using the body as a tool. I want to reconnect with these roots.

Through movement, I have found a way to accept who I am and what lives inside me. I know nothing about the traits of my biological parents. Others can look to biology. I stand with open arms, questioning what in me is inherited and what comes from the environments I have been part of.

7.2. Movement as tool

Since I was a child, I have used movement to express feelings and emotions that I do not fully know how to articulate or manage. I believe that the body has a richer vocabulary than the voice. When I lack words for something, I use my body to explain it.

Dance, for me, consists of a wide range of movements flowing in a certain rhythm and tempo in other words, not a choreography. There is freedom in not having to place something into a system or remain within a box where everyone is the same. For me, dance is not about being skilled; it is about being able to express myself as if I were at home.

7.3. Music as tool

Music has always been a source of inspiration, motivation, and a crucial way for me to channel emotions. Throughout my education, I have found freedom through music. Music from all parts of the world has pulled me out of a Eurocentric mindset. I had not reflected on this until now, but subconsciously, it has been crucial for my motivation and inspiration during my studies.

My favorite artist is Stromae. He is Belgian/French with a minority background. What appeals to me is not necessarily what he sings, but the rhythm and the cultural influences within his music. Some of his songs incorporate Latin American and African rhythms. I recognize myself in the music; it resonates with me precisely because it does not sound Western.

Music is essential to me as a tool within acting. I am attuned to rhythm, and I find freedom in melody and tempo. This is perhaps not as significant for others, but for me together with movement it is a source for creating expression in a way that is more complex and multifaceted. Through music and movement, more layers within me are able to emerge.

I believe these tools are the key to making my art sustainable. They allow me to create meaning or context for myself an inner space where I am in control. I think these tools help me release unnecessary energy and carve out room for myself in the Western world. The tools give me the possibility to free myself from the system. Without them, I would not have been able to express myself to the extent that I do today. It is these tools that make my art enduring.

8. Reflection with BIPOC peers on experiences in white institutions

8.1. Antonia

The interview with Antonia Atarah (14. January 2026) was conducted because of our shared educational background and her professional experience within the field. Her artistic practice includes a BIPOC-focused and decolonial approach, which I find both inspiring and relevant to my own work. I wanted to explore how sustainable this practice is for her, and how she navigates questions of safety, identity, culture, and ethnicity within artistic and educational contexts. Antonia's master's thesis touches on the need for safer spaces (Atarah, 2023), and much of what she writes resonates with my own experiences while also offering perspectives that challenge and enrich my thinking. Our conversation became a way to deepen my understanding of safer space as an active practice, and to reflect on how institutions can better support artists with marginalized identities. The main issues we discussed were:

Safer Space as Active Practice

- Safer space requires ongoing awareness of power structures, racism, and the dominance of white institutions.
- Clarity and openness make it possible to discuss hierarchies and conditions in the room.
- Safety is created through dialogue, not assumed neutrality.

Intersectionality and Identity

- Antonia highlighted the specific challenges of being Afro-Finnish-Swedish within Western-normed environments.
- We discussed how society often reduces identity to binary categories (black or white, yes or no).
- Intersectional identities require nuanced understanding rather than simplification.

Pedagogy and Performing Arts

- Current pedagogical structures often marginalize BIPOC artists by positioning them as “the Other.”
- A decolonial mindset shifts responsibility for inclusion from the individual to the institution.
- Artistic participation should allow the full humanity of the artist, not limit them through external categorization or lack of resources.

Institutional Responsibility

- Antonia argued that safer space requires systemic change within the educational system.
- Conversations about decolonization should be mandatory from the first year of the five-year program.
- The idea of “neutrality” must be rejected; whiteness cannot be treated as the default norm.

Artistic Practice and Community

- Safety enables art to function as a playful, creative practice rather than a site of representation pressure.
- When actors feel safe, they can move beyond being seen as representatives of a minority.
- Antonia referenced her work Don’t Thank for the Food as an example of how supportive environments foster creativity and new artistic realities.

Representation as Safety

- Being the only minority in a room creates an unfair burden; Antonia believes there should never be fewer than two minority individuals in a group.
- Young actors especially need a support person to help navigate early career challenges.
- Safety must exist both onstage and backstage:
 - Technical staff must know how to light darker skin tones.
 - Makeup and hair artists must know how to work with diverse hair textures.

8.2. David

I interviewed David Robertson (8. January 2026), a dramaturg, to broaden the professional perspectives included in my thesis. Our earlier conversations about Nordic mindsets, nationalism, and racism showed that he has a nuanced understanding of cultural identity and power structures. As a dramaturg trained at a prestigious London institution and as a minority himself, David offers valuable insights into representation, hierarchy, and the cultural dynamics within theatre. Interview focused on how safer spaces can be created in theatre institutions and how artists can navigate the challenges embedded in these environments. The main issues we discussed were:

Understanding Safer Space

- David views safer space as an environment shaped by curiosity, open dialogue, and reasoning rather than rigid hierarchies.
- He feels at home in the theatre because practitioners often engage in discussion to understand different perspectives.
- Safety emerges through colleagues who open doors, share knowledge, and build strength through conversation.

Nationalism vs. Racism

- David suggested that interpreting certain social dynamics through a nationalistic rather than a racist lens can sometimes help individuals navigate their surroundings more effectively.
- This perspective can offer a strategic way to understand cultural tensions without reducing everything to racial conflict.

Responsibility and Leadership in Institutions

- Creating safer space requires confronting power structures and institutional racism directly.
- Leadership academic heads, theatre directors, and governing boards must actively participate in multicultural society rather than merely symbolizing diversity.
- Institutions should integrate knowledge about diversity, representation, and safer space into pedagogy and production processes.
- Future artists need a shared vocabulary to handle situations involving racism or discrimination.

Cultural Appropriation

- Institutions must take responsibility for preventing cultural appropriation, which can damage trust and create unsafe environments.
- Cultural appropriation also carries ethical and political consequences for the institution.
- Diverse representation among staff is essential for fostering learning environments grounded in curiosity and informed awareness.

Institutional Racism and Curriculum Reform

- David emphasized the need to address institutional racism at structural levels, not only interpersonal ones.
- Representative leadership is crucial for shaping inclusive artistic and educational cultures.
- Pedagogy should be redesigned to include multiple cultural perspectives within the curriculum.
- Systematic structures influence both artistic outcomes and individuals' sense of belonging.

8.3. Geoffrey

I interviewed Geoffrey Erista (18. February 2026) because he was the first person to introduce me to the idea of challenging Western norms in artistic creation, making him a central inspiration for this thesis. I wanted to understand how his pedagogical approach rooted in decolonial thinking and critical awareness can be developed within theatre education to create safer spaces for both non-Western and Eurocentric students. Our conversation explored the meaning of safer and braver spaces, the impact of colonial structures on artistic environments, and the importance of early education on power dynamics, privilege, and representation. The main issues we discussed were:

Defining Safer and Braver Spaces

- A safer space is an environment with zero tolerance for discrimination, harassment, and unequal treatment.
- The term “safer” acknowledges that complete safety cannot be guaranteed; it signals an ongoing, active effort.
- Safety requires action, not symbolic gestures like posters or guidelines.
- A braver space emphasizes the courage to speak up when witnessing discrimination or inequality.

Collective and Individual Responsibility in Performing Arts

- Collective responsibility includes respecting others, listening to needs, sharing space, and practicing consent through clear yes/no/maybe communication.
- Individual responsibility involves listening to one’s own boundaries, communicating needs, and taking care of one’s physical and emotional condition.
- Safe and brave spaces require constant negotiation between personal comfort and the courage to intervene.

Colonialism, Whiteness, and Structural Power

- Geoffrey explained that colonialism and whiteness are structural systems, not personal faults.
- Many people benefit from these systems without noticing, because the advantages are normalized and invisible to those who hold them.
- Discussions about privilege often trigger defensiveness, shifting attention from structural issues to the emotions of the majority.
- Resistance to acknowledging privilege can obstruct the creation of safer spaces.

Discomfort and Structural Change

- Giving up privilege can feel uncomfortable, as seen in reactions to movements like MeToo or earlier feminist struggles.
- Those historically in power may feel threatened when asked to share space or listen to new perspectives.
- This discomfort can hinder conversations about representation, equity, and institutional transformation.

Pedagogy, Representation, and Critical Awareness

- Establishing knowledge about colonialism and minority perspectives requires critical thinking and awareness of representation.
- Students should learn how their own backgrounds shape their artistic perspectives.
- Long-standing teaching methods must be questioned and re-evaluated.
- Early, mandatory education on colonial structures and power dynamics is essential for meaningful change.

Key Concepts for Understanding Power in Artistic Spaces

- Black body politics, colonialism, whiteness and cultural appropriation.
- These concepts reveal how historical and ongoing power structures continue to shape artistic environments and societal hierarchies.

9. Conclusions: My Experience with artistic Freedom so far

By reflecting on my education, my experience as an actor, and the interviews, I understand much more about what *safer space* means. Palfrey (2017) emphasizes the importance of diversity as a source of self-expression, learning, and collaboration. The goal is to create safer space where artists can participate with their full humanity without being limited by external categorization or lack of resources.

The interviews are an important part of this thesis. They have shifted my perspective on *safer space*: how it feels, how it functions, and how it shapes my education.

From my bachelor's degree at Westerdals, I experienced clear structural racism built into the school's structures, norms, and rules even without individuals necessarily having racist intentions. I did not have a single course that was not based on Stanislavski or other Western methods. We also never discussed how art shapes or influences diverse representation. The school did not question which plays were relevant or appropriate for our specific class. As a result, casting and role distribution often felt discriminatory.

From my master's degree, my experience has been almost the opposite. There has been room for us as individuals, and the school has been very flexible and attentive. Yet, I still experience structural racism here as well but in a more open format. Even when we are aware of racism, it still exists in the structures such as curriculums, courses, etc. At the Theatre Academy, there is a stated goal of working with decolonization. But this must be done actively with time, space, and proper discussion in order to create *safer space*.

Antonia said in the interview that we must dare to set aside time for conversations requiring both *safer space* and *brave space*, without being limited by external expectations, categorization, or lack of resources: “Because we’re not talking about whiteness at all... we can't move past whiteness if we don't talk about it.” Antonia, criticized the tendency to marginalize or stereotype BIPOC people as “the Other.” She argued that we need a decolonial mindset where the responsibility for inclusion rests on the institution rather than the individual. We do not need to agree on everything we simply need to create a room where it is possible to speak and think differently, regardless of diversity or representation. It must be possible for a minority student to exist in the institution without carrying the responsibility for their own identity.

Geoffrey argues that students should have mandatory courses exploring their own background and origins to build a shared understanding of what each person represents. He believes this should happen in the first or second year of the five-year program. I believe this topic must be addressed throughout the entire education, not confined to the early years and treated as “completed.” He also said that we must dare to talk about privilege without minimizing the situation or shifting the focus back onto oneself. He added that throughout one's education, one must be willing to remain critical of existing methods and curricula with an emphasis on representation. This aligns strongly with my own experiences.

My own experience is that minority students need room for *safer space*. I believe everyone should be able to feel and express how they are doing but also listen and be open to classmates with minority backgrounds and their experiences and needs. Students with Western backgrounds should avoid becoming defensive or interpreting discussions about racism as personal attacks. Geoffrey emphasized this strongly in our interview.

I have often experienced that such discussions shift into people sharing their own unrelated personal problems rather than staying within the pedagogical context. My conclusion is that I must give up the responsibility of creating safety for myself and trust that the institution the authority will take this responsibility and establish *brave space*.

I have learned that Artistic freedom is essential for me as an actor if I want to remain in the artistic field and make my practice sustainable. But I have rarely been able to work in such spaces. The only exception is when I created my own production, "Et vårtegn".

I have realized that artistic freedom is important for my ability to create, but I cannot create it alone. This makes it difficult to sustain my practice without external support. Based on my experience. This is problematic, because the theatre field is built on working with others, not alone. If I must create my own productions to access Artistic freedom, new challenges arise: economic resources, structural power, access to space, institutional support.

This is a major problem in larger productions, where there is not enough knowledge or resources to create space. Because this is a shared experience among minority artists, it should be a strong signal that the field must actively work to improve conditions for everyone.

This was also highlighted by the interview participants in the conversations we had. Two of them have written theses that point to the same issue (Atarah, 2023) (Erista, 2020). In addition, Williams (Williams, As yet unpublished MA thesis) is working on a thesis that further supports this. The conclusion is that we, as minorities, are not given the opportunity to work as independent artists during our education or within the institutions.

Antonia feels safer when performing in works like Don't Thank for the Food, where most people in the room have minority backgrounds. Geoffrey said he first experienced artistic freedom working on Cosmic Latte, a production by Sonya Lindfors, where the actors represented a wide range of ethnic backgrounds.

To create realistic *safer space*, Antonia believes the entire educational structure must change. Talks about decolonization must be mandatory and begin in the first year of the program. We must question the idea of whiteness as a norm. Geoffrey adds that arts education must teach about colonialism and minority perspectives early on and that representation, critical thinking, and questioning of traditional methods are essential. Safer space means acknowledging that everyone sees the world through their own "lenses," instead of assuming that art is a universal mirror.

I believe it has now become clear that the responsibility for creating *safer and brave space* lies with the institution, including its leadership. The authorities like teachers, directors, theatre managers, and others in power must actively always facilitate this type of spaces throughout an education or a production.

If there are ten students in a class, and only one of them is a minority, we must find a way to ensure that the minority student's voice does not drown in the perspectives of the other nine. Whose story are we listening to, and how much space does that story receive?

The Theatre Academy's approach to diversity can also become exclusionary when not followed up with the necessary support structures. Discussions happen frequently, but the more we learn about the realities of structural racism, the more resources are required to create meaningful change. As a result, it has become clear to me that I live in a white world, with white norms, where diversity is spoken about but where responsibility often falls back onto me as an individual. And this is a burden I cannot carry alone. For me, the most important elements are: *Safer space* is a collective responsibility. *Brave space* is the responsibility of the institution and its authorities.

10. Challenges for institutions

My utopia of artistic freedom is difficult to achieve within the current structures of education and the institutions.

I believe the original idea of the Sensitive Power Border Course was good. We should create rooms where power structures can shift where facilitation and leadership roles can rotate among both teachers and students. But the question is how to facilitate it?

As a teacher, one should not draw a line between what one teaches and what one learns through teaching. A pedagogue must be willing to change and evolve alongside their students to recognize and respond to what happens in the moment, to reorganize when needed, and to understand the power position they occupy and the power position they place others in.

One must trust the room and dare to take responsibility for the situation the room demands without stepping away because one lacks knowledge or confidence in the field being discussed.

People like me are hyper-visible. One stands out from the crowd. Everything one does is noticed and judged. One cannot be neutral or indistinct.

This is a challenge the school must take seriously, and it must facilitate teaching and restructure the institution so that also these individuals can experience freedom.

11. My Utopia

Who is Maria as a private person? What is my identity when all the learned tools of being on stage are stripped away? What would I choose to do in a stage space when the room is completely dark and no one can see me? I believe I would work with a physical language.

Perhaps I should create a performance called Dancers of the Darkness. The audience enters a room that is completely dark, and the more their eyes adjust to the darkness, the more they begin to see the freedom within it. In that space, I would have the freedom to do whatever I want in the moment.

In this ideal performance, there could be a small light perhaps just a single candle burning throughout the show. The more the audience adapts to the darkness, the more clearly, they would be able to see me and on this set I really get to just be human. In this performance, I would use what I learned in Lines, rivers and bodies creating movement sequences that connect or form shape and rhythm.

I often think about what I would do in such a dark room.

Perhaps this is the answer to the question of how I can find freedom. I think it has to do with the feeling that I would be at home in the darkness, a place where almost no one can see me, a place where I feel free, a place where the audience is visiting the private Maria.

*To realize my utopia, I need society to stop placing me in a Western box
and instead trust
truly trust
another person's voice.*

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There is hope... far ahead.

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